

S E R M O N S

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ON VARIOUS

IMPORTANT SUBJECTS.

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IMPORTANT SUBJECTS

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ON VARIOUS

IMPORTANT SUBJECTS,

MORAL and THEOLOGICAL.



By the Rev. SAMUEL GREEN, *K*

Curate of Westham, Essex.

L O N D O N,

Printed for G. G. J. and J. ROBINSON, Pater-Noster-Row,
J. DEBRET, Picadilly, and W. FLAXNEY, Holborn.

MDCCCLXXXVI.

24/6/46

S E R M O N S

ON VARIOUS

IMPORTANT SUBJECTS



MORAL AND LOGICAL

By the Rev. SAMUEL GREEN

Curate of St. Andrew's, Essex

LONDON

Printed for G. O. Jones, 1, Broad Street, and W. T. Jones, 1, Holborn

MDCCLXXXVI

15/4/46

TO
THE INHABITANTS
OF THE
PARISH OF WESTHAM.

My Dear Friends,

MOST of the Discourses which I
now present to you, were de-
livered in your hearing from the
pulpit. A general desire, on your
part, to see them, and to have them
in your hands in this form, is the
sole cause of their publication. A-
midst so many treatises on moral and
theological subjects, which have been
communicated to the public by diffe-

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DEDICATION.

rent writers, I presume not to think that there is in what I have written, any thing that merits particular attention, or distinguished regard. It is incumbent on me, in my official capacity, especially when called on, to do whatever may conduce to your improvement in the conduct of this life, and your advancement towards a better; and I have the satisfaction to add that your uniform civilities and kindness, and, in particular, your generosity on a late occasion, naturally leads me to comply with your wishes.

I have great reason to be thankful to divine Providence for having placed me in a situation, in which it is not less my inclination than it is my duty,

DEDICATION.

to contribute all ⁱⁿ my power to the temporal and eternal welfare of those among whom I am called to exercise the sacred function.

I hope that you will accept of this publication as a testimony of my regard, and believe that, with the most cordial wishes and prayers for your happiness here and hereafter,

, I am,

My Dear Friends,

Your affectionate and

Faithful humble Servant,

Westham, Sept. 21, 1786.

SAMUEL GREEN.

D E D I C A T I O N

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Yours truly

My Dear Friends,

Your affectionate and

Faithful humble Servant,

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S E R M O N I.

The Uncertainty and Shortness of Human Life, and the Necessity of preparing for Death.

II KINGS XX. I.

In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death, and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amos came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die and not live.

THE Assyrian empire, in the period to which the sacred text refers, was gradually stretching over the neighbouring nations. The land of Palestine had long been protected from conquest by the particular care of a superintending Providence; but a relaxation of manners produced its usual effects among the Jewish nation: their sins drew down upon their guilty heads

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the wrath of the God of their fathers. Forfaken for a time, though not utterly, by the Sovereign Ruler of heaven and earth, they were left to the common course of human affairs, according to which virtue, or obedience to the divine laws, produces happiness to individuals, and prosperity to kingdoms; but vice, to individuals misery, and to kingdoms degradation and ruin.

The Assyrian monarch sent an haughty message to Hezekiah, threatening the king and his people with captivity, if they should not avert the wrath of the conqueror by contributions and presents. He boasted of the exploits of the kings of Assyria, from whose hands the gods of the nations had not been able to deliver them. A general alarm and dread seized both the king and people of Judah. In that day of trouble, rebuke, and blasphemy, the people, at the king's desire, kept silence, and to the menacing insults of the Assyrian answered not a word. A general fear and reverence for the name of JEHOVAH was revived among

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among the Jews, and Hezekiah, their pious king, implored the Lord God of Israel to save his people out of the hands of their enemies. His humble prayer was heard. The angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred four score and five thousand. Sennacherib king of Assyria, departed to Nineveh, and was slain even at the altar of his god, by his own sons.

Hezekiah now enjoyed the highest felicity than can be enjoyed by any mortal. He possessed an independent crown in tranquillity, the comforts of which were heightened by the recollection of the late miseries and dangers from which he had been extricated. He had obtained, by the outstretched-arm of his God, a complete and signal victory over his insulting foe, who, slain by the sword, could not renew his hostilities; and, to crown his happiness and render it complete, he enjoyed the favour of the Almighty, before whom he walked in truth and with a perfect heart.

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But Hezekiah, in the midst of all this bliss, Hezekiah, great and good, and in favour with God and man, fell sick even unto death. In these circumstances, a prophet, sent from the Lord, commands him to set his house in order; adding, that he should die, and not live. The earthly prince, struck at the approach of the king of terrors, turned his face to the wall and prayed unto the Lord, saying, "I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which was good in thy sight." This prayer, we are told, the sick king addressed to God with many tears. And it came to pass, before Isaiah was gone out of the court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah, the captain of my people, thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee; on the third day thou shalt go up into the house of the Lord, and I will add unto thy days fifteen years."

After

After the revolution of this period, which in prospect appears so long, but, on a retrospective view seems so short, Hezekiah, we are told, slept with his fathers, and Manasseh, his son, reigned in his stead.

This interesting passage of sacred Scripture represents in a lively and affecting manner the uncertainty and brevity of human life and happiness ; and the consolation which a conscience void of offence towards God and man, affords to the pious and good, under the hand of affliction, and at the approach of death. In discoursing on this important and awful subject, never to be forgotten by sinful mortals, but on an occasion * which emphatically marks the never-ceasing lapse of time, peculiarly seasonable, it is proposed,

First, to illustrate the uncertainty of human life and happiness.

* The first Sunday of 1786.

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Secondly, to shew that even the longest and most prosperous lives are but of short duration, and full of trouble. And

Thirdly, to recommend and urge from these considerations the practice of all piety and virtue.

First then it is proposed to illustrate the uncertainty of human life and happiness. —There is nothing in nature fixed and permanent: all things are in a state of fluctuation and change: immutability is the prerogative of that eternal ONE who, secured, if we may say so, in the unfathomable essence of necessary existence, is without all variableness or shadow of turning. To the astronomic eye, aided by the inventions of human art, it seems probable, from certain appearances, that other planets, as well as that which we inhabit, have undergone, and are still undergoing various revolutions, and that, amidst the rage of contending elements, worlds themselves may have become extinct. On the face of this earth,

earth, the traces of change and alteration are every where apparent and certain. Whether from the convulsions of one general deluge, or the gradual operation of the elements, hills have sunk into vallies, and vallies have risen into hills. Islands have been torn from continents by the power of fire, and restored by the recess of the ocean. The sea gains upon the land, and new islands rise up in the sea. The wrecks of animals, of enormous size, whose very species is now extinct, sea-shells, and bones of fishes found at the tops of mountains; and the bones of land animals, with forests of trees and other vegetables, buried in the depths of the earth; volcanoes, earthquakes, and inundations, declare in a general and very forcible language, that constant and never-ceasing mutation which indents and variegates the face of the world. In these, as in a mirror, we constantly behold that necessity of motion which constrains all created things to yield its station in space and time to a successor.

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It was from this general and sublime view of the perishable nature of all created beings that Job, as from a lofty eminence, looked down upon the fleeting nature of mortal man, whose days are swifter than a post, and flee away as a shadow, without seeing good, when he says, “ Surely the mountain falling cometh to nought, and the rock is removed out of his place: the waters wear the stones; thou wastest away the things which grow out of the dust of the earth; and thou destroyest the hope of man. Thou prevailest for ever against him, and he passeth; thou changeest his countenance, and sendest him away †.” — “ What then is my strength that I should hope? and what is mine end that I should prolong my life? Is my strength the strength of stones? or is my flesh of brass ‡?” “ Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also,

† See Job xiv. 18, 19, 20. ‡ Job vi. 11, 12.

as a shadow, and continueth not *." Every thing that is increased must also suffer diminution; whatever grows must also decay; and whatever is born must die. But a thousand causes precipitate the fall of man, who is cut off as a flower by the mower's scythe, and seldom "sees all his days." "One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet, and his bones are moistened with marrow. And another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure. They shall lie down alike in the dust, and the worms shall cover them †." Mortal diseases lurk in the food we eat, the air we breathe, and the passions which move and actuate this mortal frame. Infection, hereditary distemper, war famine, excess, and a thousand accidents, inseparable from the lot of humanity, menace the race of man with sudden and unforeseen disaster. But this is a matter which is brought home to every breast with the greatest

* Job xiv. 1, 2.

† Job xxi. [23, 24, 25.]

force, by the innumerable examples of sudden mortality with which every year, and month, and day is pregnant. How few infants arrive at the period of seventy years, the term mentioned by the Psalmist as that which, even without accident or unforeseen disease, concludes the space of human life? The school boy droops at the loss of his chearful companion: the young men are afflicted by the death of early and faithful friends: husbands mourn for the wives of their youth: and the early widow sits in solitary sadness: children are bereft of their parents when they most need their fostering care; and parents mourn the loss of their dear little ones, untimely cut off by some disease, which intercepts the very entrance on the stage of life. We stand, on this miserable and mortal scene, as on a field of battle, where numbers are continually falling by our side. And they who longest escape the darts of the enemy which fly around them by night and by day, are divided between grief at the loss of their companions and friends, and a melancholy
antici-

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anticipation of their own inevitable fate. Let us turn our eyes backward to the haunts of our earlier years, and revolve in our minds the history and the fate of the companions of that period of innocence and joy! or let us look into those tables which philosophy, or the love of gain forms on just principles, for calculating the probability of human life! how small a portion of time do such rigid surveys hold out to human expectation! The young man of twenty years is startled at the thought that, according to human probability, his career of life is almost half run. The prospect darkens to his view as he advances through the stages of forty, fifty, and sixty. Now he fondly inquires concerning the age of all with whom he converses, eager to find an anchor of hope in multiplied instances of longevity. He hears and reads of men and women living beyond seventy, eighty, and even ninety years, and in his cheerful moods he recollects with triumph that here and there he has read, in the periodical publications, of the day, of a person attaining to a whole

6 century.

century. Thus the illusions of hope make fools of us all ! and lull us too often into the lethargy of the sluggard, who indulges himself with a little more sleep, a little longer slumber ; who puts his hand in his bosom and is loth to take it out.

Were the great business of life only to pass it over with as great a share of pleasure, and as little of pain as possible, the illusions of imagination, the flatteries of self-love, might justly be considered as sweet oblivious potions presented by the kind hand of nature, for the purpose of alleviating those calamities which on all hands surround us. But when we consider that we are formed by Providence for action, and by reason and an inward consciousness of liberty rendered accountable for our actions ; when we reflect that we have a variety of duties to perform, that we are on a long journey which must lead to happiness or misery, as it is concluded in proper time, or protracted beyond the appointed bounds, we shall deem it egregious folly to sit down in.

in indolence or ease, amusing our fancies with the common fallacies of procrastination. If one has lived to an hundred years, how many thousands to that one have died before they attained the age of three score? Let us dispel the clouds of deceit which hope spreads over our intellectual powers, and seriously consider how far we have advanced in the vale of life; and how many years we may reasonably expect to live. Fix that period, if you will, at the greatest length of days indulged by Providence to any of your contemporaries, and then suppose that God may add to your life, as he did to that of Hezekiah fifteen years more, still death will overtake you, and that with a quick pace, nor will his terrors be diminished by their hanging a few years longer over your heads. Put not your trust then in the hope, nay not even in the certainty, were it possible to attain it, of long life; for, the longest and most prosperous lives are but of short duration and full of trouble: and this was the second thing which it was proposed to illustrate.

Dura-

Duration being infinite in 'itself, the length of time for which any particular thing or being exists, that is any portion whatever of time compared with this infinite standard, must appear as altogether nothing, and vanity. But there is another standard by which we are to judge of the brevity of human life; and that is, the powers or capacity of the understanding, and the wishes or desires of the soul. The powers of the understanding are vast and almost unbounded. They are not confined to any attainments of knowledge, but are enlarged and extended by every new discovery, to a capacity of comprehending discoveries in science still more and more general and sublime. Our intellectual powers are above all created being, and soar in the regions of truths, abstracted and universal, wandering, in the language of the poet *, through eternity, and aspiring to a nearer and nearer union, or knowledge of that mysterious Being, whose laws

* Milton.

are so hard to be comprehended, and whose nature is incomprehensible. This is, as it were the constitution of the human mind, elevated above appetite and sense. This is the chief end, and highest dignity of man: to know God, and the more it knows, the more to admire, and love, and be swallowed up and lost, and assimilated to his attributes and perfections. Hence, in the language of the sacred Scriptures, faith, religion, and a knowledge of God, are so often used as synonymous terms. If we measure human life or the exercise of our faculties by this standard, this gradual approach to God in knowledge, and that purity of affection which such knowledge inspires, this mortal stage will appear only as the dawn, the commencement of our existence. Looking forward into eternity, and casting our eyes abroad, as far as repeated efforts can carry us, into the unlimited regions of space, with all that it contains, the progress to be made here in this spiritual excellency, after which we aspire, seems as nothing. A life prolonged even

to

to endless ages, beyond death and the grave, is that to which we are naturally led to look by the powers of our mind, and which religion encourages us to expect.

But if our desires are limited to objects of sense, in this case too, human life may be considered as of short continuance, since no man leaves life, as a guest leaves a well furnished table. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing, nor the other senses with their respective objects. No man quits without reluctance the realms of light and life, and resigns himself willingly and without regret to the sleep of death, shut out from the light of day, and the society of friends, a prey to worms and the silent grave. Yet with all this anxiety for life, it is not only short but full of trouble. Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards.

The laws of nature do not more certainly produce their various effects, than the physical

physical and moral state of man subjects him to various and endless calamities. The descriptions that are given of human misery in profane, and still more those exhibited by sacred writings, are extremely affecting, because they are just, and we all recognise their justness. Sceptical writers have denied that this gloom hangs over the condition of mankind, and boldly asserted that the general aspect of men is gay * and chearful. In a matter that is determined by every man's experience, it were superfluous to waste time with unnecessary arguments. The most fortunate, upon being asked whether, were it at their option, they would choose to act the by-past part of their lives over again, to undergo the same anxieties and enjoyments, inquietudes and relaxations, hopes and fears, will answer, if they are candid, that rather than run over so wearisome a course, they would willingly resign their being. Un-

* Lord Kaimes passim, and Dr. Adam Smith in his Theory of Moral Sentiments.

happy, then, the condition of mortals whose lives can neither be enjoyed without a preponderating mixture of pain, nor death encountered without horror ! religion, and religion only, applies a remedy suited to so desperate an evil. It teaches us that we are placed here as in a field of battle, assuring us that those who fight the good fight of faith, who steadily perform the duties required of them, notwithstanding their temptations to vice, shall receive a crown of life. It promises the armour of God, to make up for the weakness of human nature. In this contest, Jesus Christ, the good and faithful shepherd, and bishop of souls, invites all that are weary and heavy laden to come unto him, with a promise of rest to their souls. The shortness and uncertainty of life, therefore, are not without consolation to the Christian, “ who sets his affections on things above, and not on things on earth. For he is dead, and his life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, therefore, who is his life, shall appear, he also shall appear with him in glory.”

glory *." These consolations fall under the third head of our discourse which was,

To recommend, from the uncertainty and shortness of this calamitous life, the practice of piety and virtue.

The practice of piety and virtue, in every fortune and stage of life, has greatly the advantage over a vicious and abandoned course, in respect of health, fame, and tranquillity of mind, and all that either adorns life or renders it tolerable, or in any degree delightful. But in distress, certainly in advanced years, and on the approach of death, the recollection of a well spent life, a life spent in the fear of God, and the hope which that recollection inspires, is the only true and substantial comfort. In vain do men with the Stoics of ancient times, oppose to the sufferings of distracted and oppressed nature, the firmness of that philosophy which teaches that pain is no real evil;

* Coloss. iii. 2, 3, 4.

or attempt with the Epicureans to drown all anticipations of diseases and death in present enjoyment, or to console themselves under affliction with the notion that it will either be short, or not intolerable. The voice of nature is too forcible and loud to give way to such arguments. But, infuse the hope of everlasting life, and no situation, however disastrous, shall be void of comfort. Animated by this hope, the weakness of human nature has often defied persecution, and triumphed over dangers, torments, and death. The Christian "though troubled on every side, is not distressed; though perplexed, not in despair; though persecuted, not forsaken; though cast down, not destroyed *." What was Hezekiah's resource, and what his consolation on a death-bed? the recollection that he had walked before the Lord in truth, and with a perfect heart, and that he had done that which was good in his sight. This, and not his riches, dig-

* 2 Corin. 8, 9.

nity,

nity, or sovereign power, this only could afford him comfort. Let us imitate the piety of his life, that we may feel similar consolation at the approach of death.

It is not our present design to explain or recommend every duty incumbent on the servant of God : but there is one duty which, as it has been omitted or fulfilled, must, at the hour of death, give pain or comfort to every dying person, not wholly devoid of natural affection. This duty is specified in our text, and therefore it is incumbent on me to recall it to your minds, and if possible to impress it on your hearts. That duty is, the obligation of parents to provide, as far as their circumstances will allow, for their children ; “ set thine house in order, said the prophet to the afflicted king, for thou shalt die and not live.” Set your houses in order, my Christian brethren, I conjure you by that parental tenderness which creative benevolence has deeply inspired into your own breasts, for ye shall assuredly die, and not live. And

the present is the time for you to discharge this obligation. The first distemper that affails you may be mortal. It were presumptuous and vain to hope that a divine miracle should prolong your precarious lives. For most losses there may possibly be a remedy. Wealth, reputation, and health injured or lost may be restored; but lost time can never be redeemed. "Wherefore awake then thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil *."

Ephes. v. 14, 15, 16.

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S E R M O N II.

The Christian Course.

HEBREWS xii. 1, 2.

Wherefore seeing we also are encompassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

THAT example is more efficacious than precept, is a truth which has grown even into a proverb, and is confirmed by the universal consent of mankind. It is example which forms the mind, and fixes the character of youth; it is example which gradually produces

those habits which pass into a second nature; and, if we were, on this topic to enlarge our views to the affairs of nations, we should find that it is example which, more than any other human cause or circumstance, governs the world,

Examples operate upon the mind principally in two ways. They impress upon our minds, with great force, a full and lively conviction that what has been done once, may be done again; and, as there is in human nature a strong principle of imitation, they dispose us to repeat or to act them over again. Thus examples have the power of self-multiplication. They extend their influence more and more, and as their force is extended it is also increased.

In order to encourage the Christian to run with patience the race that is set before him, the divinely inspired apostle conjures him not to cast away his confidence, which hath great recompence of reward;

reward ; urging at the same time the necessity of patience, lest, having obeyed the will of God, he should lose the reward of his obedience. “ For yet a little while, says he, and he that shall come, will come and will not tarry *.” In the mean time he shews that the just man, that lives in the fear of God, is supported and animated in his steady obedience to the divine law, by the consideration that the reward of obedience is great, and that “ he is faithful that hath promised it.” The just live by faith, “ which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” The apostle proceeds to set forth the power and the praises of faith, both as a source of knowledge, a principle of action, and the means of drawing down miraculous power from Heaven, equally displayed in the resurrection of the dead, and in enabling weak and timid mortals to brave torments and death ; and amidst all that is horrible to human nature, without waver-

* Hebrews x. 35, 36, 37.

ing, to hold fast their possession. "Wherefore, he concludes, seeing we also are encompassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."

Men of like passions with ourselves have proved the power of faith to exalt their courage, their fortitude, and their ambition, if we may say so, of acquitting themselves like men, in the fight of God and angels, and rising to that height of glory and happiness which rewards the virtuous toils and sufferings of the faithful. There was nothing in their nature superior to ours, except the strength of their faith, which is the gift of God. But why should not our faith, our trust and reliance in the divine promises be as strong and as ardent as theirs, since the grace of God is not contracted nor his power diminished? since neither is his ear waxed gross that it cannot hear, or his arm shortened

ened that he cannot save? The promises of God to us are as free and unbounded as they ever were to mankind at any period of the dispensation of grace. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, in full assurance of faith, that we may obtain grace to help us in every time of need. In the hour of trial, what time our heart is overwhelmed, and frail nature begins to faint and to yield to temptation, then, at that very instant we are to recollect the cloud of witnesses that prove how faithful he is who has promised to send his holy spirit to aid our own weak endeavours in every time of need. Animated by this recollection, we are to look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; the author of our faith, because he has redeemed us by his blood, and purchased by his merit eternal life to all who obey him; the finisher of our faith, because he instructs us by his word, and rules, restrains, governs and supports his children by his holy spirit. We are to look to him in the hour of distress and danger, as children to
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a father able and willing to help them, and who is even more ready to grant than we are to make our requests : under the rebukes of guilt and the dread of punishment we are to behold him as the propitiation for sin ; in doubt and darkness we are to consult his word as our own instructor and guide ; and when under the tyranny of any unruly passion or appetite which leads us captive into the paths of death, we are to view him as a prince, but still a saviour, set down at the right hand of the throne of God, that is, invested with divine power to rule, restrain, conquer, and subdue all his and our enemies.

If, in the present circumstances of the church, we do not behold any such extraordinary measures of faith as are recounted in this Epistle to the Hebrews, and from which the apostle draws the conclusion in our text, we must consider that the Christian, in the course of his conflict with sin, is not called to resist unto blood. But in all times of severe trial, when

persecution arises on account of a constant profession of the faith, the strength of the Lord makes up for the weakness of human nature. It is not above a century since we have had examples of martyrdom equal to those of which we read in the very first ages of Christianity. Even the weaker sex, in the short reign of that bigotted monarch whom a just indignation of his follies and crimes chased from the throne of these realms, had trial of "cruel mockings and scourgings, yea moreover of bonds and imprisonments and death itself," all of which they sustained with a constancy and firmness more than human, and which could have been inspired only by that faith which under the Mosaic dispensation, or, the dispensation of the law "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness was made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens, and raised

raised the dead to life *." Even women, in the period to which we have referred, were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

In the common course of life, the common measure of strength which is bestowed on the disciple of Christ, is sufficient to support him in his pilgrimage to the new Jerusalem, if he would but exert it. Let the Christian but use the talents with which he is endowed, whatever they be, well, and to the best advantage, and in every hour of need, he will receive more talents. He has only to ask and he shall receive, to seek and he shall find, to knock and it shall be opened unto him. If he asks in faith, without doubting or wavering, the Lord will not turn away his prayer, but he will hearken and assuredly deliver him. This is a matter indeed that may be proved by experience. Is any

* Heb. xi. 33, 34.

man,

man, from a deep sense of sin and misery desirous to flee from the wrath to come, to take upon him Christ's yoke which is easy and his burden which is light that he may find rest to his soul, is he sincerely, honestly, and anxiously desirous to take up his cross and to follow Christ, to lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset him, and to run with patience the race that is set before him, in the name and strength of the Lord, let him do so: let him set the Lord always before him, and let him mark with care the very first obstacle or interruption that interposes itself to obstruct his progress; in that moment of difficulty, let the Christian, with his eyes still fixed on Jesus, hold on his way. If his knees wax feeble so that he is unable to stand, let him fall, if he must fall, on his knees to God in prayer crying out, with the disciples in the midst of a tempest at sea, "Lord save me, I perish." He who rebuked the winds and the sea, will also quiet the tumults of passion, and restore the suppliant to that tranquillity
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of mind which accompanies a consciousness of duty and a sense of divine favour. When unable to resist, we feel an inclination to yield to the allurements of sin, we must have recourse to the last refuge of the distressed, prayer and supplication. We must look unto Jesus with an eye of faith, imploring, though by mute expression, succour in such a time of need. Conceive him, at such a moment, putting the question to you, which, while on earth he put to one who sought a cure, "Believest thou that I am able to do this?" and O! men that we are, of little faith why should we doubt? But if we feel, even in such a crisis, our hearts to be cold and languid, and our faith proportionably weak, then we are to confess its weakness, and, being convinced of the power and inclination of Jesus to save us, in our understandings, however we may be unaffected by this conviction in our hearts, to cry out "Lord we believe! help thou our unbelief! Lord if thou wilt thou canst make us clean." Sincerity alone
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is wanting to draw down from the fountain of life, such streams of comfort as shall enable the pilgrim to go on towards Zion, rejoicing in the strength of the Lord.

The exhortation to look unto Jesus undoubtedly implies this spirit of prayer and supplication in every time of need. As the eyes of an handmaid are turned towards her mistress, from whom she expects all that is necessary to this life, according to the observation of the Psalmist, so the eyes of the Godly wait upon the Lord, from whom they receive all that is good, until he send them mercy and deliverance. But it likewise implies the contemplation of his life, his sufferings, his death, and all that he taught and did for men. We are informed in the Book of Numbers, that as the children of Israel journeyed in the Wilderness, from mount Hor, by the way of the Red-Sea, to compass the land of Edom, they murmured against God, who sent fiery serpents among them, so that much people of Israel died. "Therefore

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the people came to Moses and said, we have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole: and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived*.” This brazen serpent was a type and pre-figuration of Christ. For “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the Wilderness, even so it behoved the Son of man to be lifted up, on the cross; that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life†.” Let us then look to Jesus from the time that he lay wrapt in swaddling bands in a manger, to the time of his ascension, when he was

* Numbers xxi. 7, 8, 9, † John iii. 14, 15
received

received into heaven, and a cloud intercepted him from the view of his disciples, but particularly let us behold him extended on the cross, a voluntary sacrifice for the sins of the world; enduring the cross, despising the shame. Viewing so bright, so affecting a pattern of all that is amiable and heroic in virtue, it is impossible but we shall be more and more transformed into his divine image. If he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, if he endured such inexpressible sufferings as are denominated in the word of truth "The pains of Hell," shall we think it hard, in imitation of his example, to undergo those light afflictions with which we are beset in our Christian course, since they are the medicines that purge the soul, and prepare us for the fruition of so great a weight of glory? Consider this, my brethren, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Forget not the exhortation which speaketh unto you as children "My son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of

him. For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? but if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh, which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he, for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness *." Thus while our Lord lays upon us the burden of affliction and trial, he alleviates it by reminding us of the intention with which it is laid. Thus he pulls the sting as it were out of sorrow, and sweetens to us the bitter cup which he himself drank unmixed. To all this tenderness he adds the consolation of sym-

* Heb. xii. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

S E R M O N II. 37

pathy with our infirmities and sorrows *.”
 O amiable and divine phyfician! O paternal and divine love! who, to be partakers of fuch mercy, to be the objects of fuch care would not rather fuffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleafure of fin for a feafon? Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, ftrengthen the feeble knees, make ftraight paths for your feet, and run with patience the race that is fet before you. This is the duty and the dignity of man: this is the wifeft, the fafeft, the moft happy and glorious courfe.

* Heb. iv. 15.

THE HISTORY OF THE
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FROM THE FOUNDATION
TO THE PRESENT
TIME
BY
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S E R M O N III.

The Christian Course.

HEBREWS xii. 1, 2.

Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses; let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

THE fall of man, or the origin of evil, is a subject which has exercised the mental powers and faculties of divines and philosophers in all ages of the Christian church, and in every period of moral science. The Scriptural account of this matter is, by rational divines, allowed to be allegorical, and, in general, to signify,

that in human nature, sense, appetite, and passion, are apt to burst the bounds of reason, to trample on the cool decisions of judgment, and to hurry us into manifold violations of the laws of God: Laws which our judgment approves, but which our wills are so often reluctant to obey. But the question recurs, why is such a system established or permitted under the administration of that Supreme Being, of whose goodness, wisdom, and truth, every man is, or may be fully convinced by the principles and doctrines of natural religion. The schemes of Divine providence and grace, which embrace the universe and different orders of intellectual beings, and the abyss of space and time, it is impossible that our limited capacities should fully comprehend. The mysteries of the divine government, the wonders of divine grace, as we are informed by divine authority, attract the attention and the curiosity of those superior natures who inhabit other mansions than this earth in the capacious house of the Father of the universe. It is the prerogative

S E R M O N III. 41

rogative and the glory of Divine wisdom, according to the observation of the wisest of men, to conceal a matter, as it is the honour of the most exalted of mankind to explore, and search out his ways *. And, though it is beyond our power to grasp the ways of the Almighty in their full extent, yet as we advance in our search, they open more and more to our view; our wonder and adoration are more and more excited; and the more we love and approve, and confide in that eternal Being, whose eye is upon every part of the world, who is concerned for the happiness of all his creatures, who provides for all according to their wants, who raises the powers of intelligent beings, and while he manifests in the sight of these his own perfection and glory, maintains the harmony of the whole creation.

Human nature is, indeed, prone to evil, that is to *excess*, for all our appetites and

* Prov. xxv. 2.

passions in a certain degree, are natural and innocent; it is ever ready to break through the restraints of moderation and reason; and, divided between our inclinations and our duty, we are agitated between the remonstrances of conscience, and the storms of passion. But this very propensity in the mysterious course of Providence, becomes a subject of discipline, triumph, and glory to the Christian, who, assisted by divine grace, combats the perverseness of his own nature, and having at last fought the good fight of faith, obtains the reward of eternal life. Were there no liberty or choice of action, where would be the merit of acting well? Were there no enemy to combat, where would be the victory? It is probable, that all reasonable and moral beings have had, like us, their day of conflict and probation; and we know that some of the angels have stood, and that some of them have fallen. The Son of God himself, our divine propitiation, instructor, and pattern, submitted to such a trial. He took
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our nature upon him, he participated in human infirmities, he was made perfect through suffering; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation to all that obey him. Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, having fulfilled the law, having stood firm in an evil day to the will of God, and triumphed over death and sin, is now crowned with glory and honour. Thus having, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man, he hath become the captain of our salvation, the author and finisher of our faith.—“ Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them, who, through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved

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hoved him to be made like unto his brethren; that he might be a merciful and faithful high-priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. Thus, the ways of God to man are justified. As in the first Adam all died, so in the second all shall be made alive." The propensity we feel to sin, if we are not wanting to ourselves, will be counterbalanced by that divine aid which the captain of our salvation is able and willing to dispense: the loss and disadvantage we labour under from hereditary inclinations to sin, are made up by communications of Divine strength in the word, and by the spirit of God: Your evil desires will not be imputed to you as crimes. They are, to speak after the manner of men, your misfortunes, or rather the condition of your being. But raising our views to the plan of divine grace, we shall neither consider them as misfortunes, nor

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S E R M O N III. 45

have reason to complain of the condition of our being. For they are, by the grace of God, a source of virtuous and praiseworthy conflict; a subject of triumph and victory; the means of improving and exalting our moral nature, and raising us to the fellowship of saints in Heaven, the spirits of just men made perfect. The hope of so glorious a reward, together with all the various encouragements, aids, and directions of faith, has in fact enabled men, of like infirmities with ourselves, to encounter and to overcome all that is terrible to sense, while they steadily pursued the paths prescribed by their Saviour and their God. “Wherefore, (the apostle reasons in the words of our text), seeing we also are encompassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and

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and is set down at the right hand of God."

In this inference, not less just than comfortable, there is, First, an exhortation, and

Secondly, encouragement to comply with it.

The exhortation is, " Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." The Christian life, on account of the difficulties that attend it, is compared in the Sacred Scriptures to a field of battle. Fight the good of faith, says the apostle Paul to Timothy, lay hold on eternal life: to a struggle to enter by a narrow path through a straight gate; enter ye, in says our Saviour, at the straight gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because straight is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life,

life, and few there be that find it. It is compared to labouring in a vineyard, to the taking up of a cross, and to a variety of other courses which imply labour, difficulty and perseverance. The servant of the Lord is commanded to labour to enter into rest, to press forward to a mark, to watch, to stand fast in the faith, to quit himself like a man, and to be strong, and in the words of our text, to run the race that is set before him. This race is, in general, all that is required of a Christian with respect both to faith and practice, or as the apostle briefly expresses it, obedience to the truth. “Ye did run well, he writes to the Galatians, who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth *?” To the same purpose was the answer of our Lord to the young man who put the question to him, “What good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments †.”

* Galat. v. 7.

† Math. xix. 17.

The Christian life is very fitly compared to a journey, and to a race, not only on account of the difficulties which attend it, but because, like a journey, and a race, it is a state of progression, or improvement in piety and virtue; a gradual mortification of the old man with his deeds, and growth in the knowledge and love of God; for the Christian, "with open face beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, is changed into the same image from glory to glory*." Blessed is the man whose strength is in the Lord, and in whose heart are his ways: who passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools†. He goeth on from strength to strength and in Zion appeareth before God‡."

That we may pursue this journey towards Zion with alacrity, that we may run without being weary, that we may

* 1 Corinth. 11, 18.
 refreshment and comfort.

† Metaphors expressive of refreshment and comfort.
 ‡ Psalm lxxxiv. 5, 6, 7.

walk without being faint, we are directed to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us. The cares and anxieties of this world are to be thrown behind us as unworthy of our pursuit, our grand object, and the mark to which we press, being the righteousness and the kingdom of God. The appetites of sense are to be mortified, that our spiritual desires may be increased. Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things, and chasteneth his soul with fasting. St. Paul kept his body under, and brought it under subjection: lest that by any means, when he had preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away*." But we are not only directed to resist, strive against, and to subdue all evil appetites, passions, and habits in general, but particularly to bend our efforts against that "sin which doth so easily beset us." There is in every man some predominant passion to which other

* 1 Corinth. ix. 25, 26, 27.

passions yield, and which swallows up, if not vigorously opposed, all the feelings of virtue, and emotions of piety. This predominant passion is derived, and nourished by natural temperament, education, professions and habits of life, or other circumstances. In some it is avarice; in some, the love of pleasure; and in others, pride and ambition. Whatever it be, it is to be watched and guarded against as our most deadly enemy; an enemy the more to be dreaded, that it carries not on its attacks against the outworks and avenues, but is in possession of the very citadel of the heart. This foe it is, indeed, difficult to dislodge. Well might Solomon say, that "he that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city." The prevailing passion enters into our very constitution, becomes a second nature, and mixes with our very soul and spirit. Yet, arduous as the task is, it must be performed, "for he that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls†."

† Prov. xxv. 28.

But where is the bold incisive hand that is able to divide asunder his soul from his spirit; to extricate his judgment from the dominion of his passions? For this purpose divine armour is necessary; clothed with which, though weak in himself, he shall be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked, and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God." Thus armed, the Christian is enabled to walk towards Zion in the midst of surrounding enemies. Thus he conquers himself, and in proportion as the old man decays, the inward man is renewed day by day. The

course, the journey, or race of a Christian, being co-extended with life, he must persevere in it to the end, he must run with patience, he must not be weary in well-doing, knowing that in due time he shall reap if he faint not. That he may be sustained in this arduous course, he must reflect on the cloud of witnesses to the truth of God's promise of rest to all that labour diligently and constantly to enter therein. He must look unto Jesus the author and finisher of his faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

S E R M O N IV.

*The Manner and the Reward of Coming
unto Christ.*

MATTH. xi. 28, 30.

*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are
heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me ;
for I am meek and lowly in heart : and
ye shall find rest unto your souls. For
my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

IT was the manner of the divine instructor of mankind, who commonly taught in parables, and who knew how to insinuate impressions of truth into the human mind, to take occasion from some present scene or circumstances, to discourse on spiritual subjects. The mind does not easily quit any present bent or tendency, nor pass suddenly, without reluctance, from material and sensual, to

spiritual and heavenly objects. But as there is a mystical resemblance between the material and spiritual world, we pass from any object in the former, to any object in the latter to which it bears some affinity, by an association which aids and facilitates the transition, and arrests, as it were, and clothes the subtle nature of abstracted and invisible, with the substantiality of bodily forms.

Our Saviour therefore, according to his divine wisdom, leads the minds of his disciples and hearers from material and present, to spiritual and future objects. For example. “ Jesus, on a certain time, being wearied with his journey, sat on *Jacob's Well* near to Sichar a city of Samaria, under the sultry heat of the sun, it being then about the sixth hour. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said unto her, Give me to drink. The woman said unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me who am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no deal-

dealings with the Samaritans. Jesus answered and said unto her, if thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, give me to drink : thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water—whosoever drinketh of the water of this well, shall thirst again ; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst ; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life*.”

Again, after the miracle of the loaves and fishes, when the people drew near to him in great numbers, in confidence, from what they had experienced, that by attending this extraordinary person, they should be plentifully provided for, our Lord embraced that opportunity of exhorting them to “ Labour, not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life,

* John iv. 5—14.

which the son of man shall give unto you.—For the bread of God is he which cometh down from Heaven, and giveth life unto the world—I am the bread of life—He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out*.”

It was, probably, in like manner, upon some occasion which awakened the sensibility of those whom he addressed, and led them by a natural transition to receive, and ponder upon his words, that our Saviour pronounced the invitation in our text, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Labouring men, ready to faint, in a sultry climate, under their burthens, or panting under other efforts too great for their strength, would naturally lend a will-

* John vi: 27—37.

ing ear to a voice that called upon them to exchange slavery and oppression for a yoke that was easy and a burden that was light. And, as the woman of Samaria said to our Lord, discoursing of the water of everlasting life, "Sir, give me this water that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw." And as the multitude, upon our Lord's exhortation to labour for meat which endureth unto everlasting life, cried out, "Lord evermore give us this bread;" so we may reasonably suppose, that the fainting labourers to whom the invitation in our text was immediately addressed, would reply "Lord evermore give us this rest."

But all scripture is given by inspiration of God, for the comfort and edification of the churches in all the stages of christianity. To us too, these words are addressed. "Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And we too, if we were duly sensible of the burthen which op-

presses us, and of the nature of that heavenly rest to which we are invited, would answer from our souls "Lord evermore give us rest!" Let us enquire

✓ First, into the character, condition, or situation of those who are here invited to come unto Jesus Christ.

Secondly, into the meaning of the invitation "come unto me." And

Thirdly, into the motives or encouragement by which the invitation is urged and enforced "and I will give you rest."

In general, the character, condition, or situation of those who are here invited to come unto Jesus Christ, is that of distress. The whole have not need of a cure, but they that are sick. The afflicted in body or mind, mourners of every kind, the weary and heavy laden, are invited to drink of the water of life, to enter into that rest which remaineth to the people of God. Mourners are of two kinds: worldly mourners and spiritual mourners. World-
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ly mourners are they who lament the loss of friends, fret and pine at the loss of reputation or worldly good things, or languish under poverty and bodily infirmities. The poor and needy, the widow and the orphan, those who, for their crimes or their misfortunes, are despised or rejected of men, outcasts from human society, the wretched of every kind, all who have none to help them ! all are invited to a participation of those comforts with which the Lord, in the multitude of their disquieting and melancholy thoughts, soothes and consoles the troubled minds of those who put their trust in him. These mourners smart under the effects of sin, the cause of all crying and pain. Spiritual mourners are they who lament and grieve at the source of all sorrow ; who, raising their views to the relation in which they stand to their Creator and Redeemer, and considering the ungrateful returns they have made to all his various goodness, look forward with trembling to the future

60 S E R M O N IV.

effects of his just indignation, and labour under a sense of his present displeasure. The law with its terrors awakens their conscience and alarms their fears. They are convinced, they clearly perceive, they feel that there is a necessary and immutable distinction between truth and falsehood, right and wrong, justice and injustice, virtue and vice; and, at the same time, that innocence and virtue are the natural objects of complacency and approbation, but that guilt and vice are the natural objects of aversion, indignation, and punishment. When they turn their eyes inward upon themselves, and reflect that the Lord is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, they are filled with a just dread of his displeasure, and his terrors encompass them about. Such mourners are initiated into the baptism of John, or of the law, or in other words, the doctrines of repentance; that kind of Repentance, we mean, which is excited by the fear of punishment. And such penitents are not far from the "kingdom of Heaven," by
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which is understood the evangelical dispensation, or all those sublimer motives to purity, righteousness, and holiness which are contained in the Gospel. To those who are initiated in this dispensation, sin begins to appear, not only terrible in its necessary concomitants and consequences, but odious also in its nature. The amiableness of virtue, the beauty of holiness, the propriety and majestic grandeur of justice and conformity to the righteous and eternal laws of God and of truth, begin to impress and captivate their hearts. They begin to hunger and thirst after righteousness; they not only fear but they love God; and as they love him, they naturally desire his favour, and to be transformed more and more into his likeness. But still they are sensible that a principle of corruption secretly lurks within them, and drags them, against their reason and even their will, into the filthy mire of moral pollution. They find a law, that when they would do good, evil is present with them; for they delight in the law of
God

God after the inward man, but they see another law in their members, warring against the law of their mind, and bringing them into captivity to the law of sin. In such circumstances they grieve and are afflicted at the perverseness of their nature, and the obduracy of their evil hearts; and cry out with the apostle O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Thus then, the weary and heavy laden may be divided into two classes: those who labour under the various miseries of human life; and those who are awakened to a fear of punishment, a sense of duty, and a longing desire after conformity, acceptance, and favour with God. Under one or other of these all the sons of men are comprehended. None is either so happy, so wretched, or so vile as to be excluded. Accordingly the gracious calls of the Gospel are addressed to all the sons of men without exception. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat;

yea,

yea, come buy wine and milk without money, and without price *." We proceed now, secondly, to inquire into the meaning of the invitation "come unto me."

The powers and operations of the mind are all of them expressed in the language taken from material objects. It is the great aim of the Christian religion to restore the purity and dignity of human nature by means of the precepts, the doctrines, the hopes, the views, and the examples that are held up to us in the Gospel. Jesus Christ, the wisdom, the son of God, is the divine dispenser of all those graces, virtues, and gifts which are bestowed on believers, and therefore they must come to him to receive them. The wicked and reprobate are represented as at a distance from God, because he is not in all their thoughts, because they think not of him, and desire not the

* Isaiah Iv. 1.

knowledge of his ways. But this distance, this cold indifference is inconsistent with the christian life, which is spent in conversation, in intimacy, in union with Jesus Christ. For there is such a thing as mental absence and presence, as well as bodily absence and presence. The presence, the contact of bodily objects necessarily involve in them relations of space and time. But the mind is present to whatever it thinks upon, whatever it makes an object of attention or reflection. Accordingly we say, in common language, of a person whose thoughts wander from his company, and the object of conversation, that he is absent: his mind, which is himself, is fixed, and present with other objects, perhaps in another age, or another climate. For space and time form no interruption to the spiritual energy of the mind, which darts with celestial vigour over the greatest measures of both, with the same ease with which it surmounts the least. Christians are therefore said to live with Christ, to dwell with him, to
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S E R M O N IV. 65

converse with him, to walk with him, to draw near to him, and to be united and made one with him; as he also is said to abide with them, and to be formed in them; because Christians have their God and Saviour uppermost and most constantly in their thoughts, and meditate on the divine laws day and night. They walk over the scenes in which their God and their Saviour displayed his healing power, and issued his life-giving doctrines on earth; and look forward to those regions of bliss beyond the skies where Christ sits at the right hand of God invested with divine power, and still retaining all his inclination to save them from sin and punishment, and to raise them to immortality and glory. He sends forth, for their comfort, and to preserve their union with himself, the spirit of truth who abides with them for ever, and who constantly recalls to their mind the divine precepts and laws, thus maintaining that mental presence with the Lord, in which

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the Christian life consists. He leaves them not comfortless in the mean time, and he consoles them with the hope of still farther comfort. For he promises to come unto them, and to bring them to still closer and closer union, by farther and farther communications of himself*. They, on their part raise their affections and place them on things above, longing after still nearer and nearer approaches to the source of all excellence, perfection, and bliss, waiting with patience, and with trembling joy and hope for the time when they shall be absent from the body, and present with the Lord; when this mortality shall be exchanged for immortality, this corruption for incorruption, and when death shall be swallowed up in victory.

The motives or encouragements by which the invitation to come unto Jesus Christ is urged and enforced, which form the third and last object of our present dis-

* John xiv. and xv.

course,

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course, comprehend all that can affect and move the mind of man: freedom from pain; joy in the communion and fellowship of our Redeemer, present to us now by his word and spirit, and to be revealed more fully to our enlarged views in a future state of existence, in which we shall be purified from all remains of sin, and exalted to the nature and made partakers of the joys of the angels. The troubles that afflict mankind are too sensibly felt to stand in need of illustration: and human joys at best, are unsatisfactory in their nature, and short in their duration. Wherefore, then, should we spend our money for that which is not bread? and our labour for that which satisfieth not? The expence that is bestowed, and the labour that is undergone in pursuit of earthly and uncertain comforts, if guided by the laws of God, will obtain consolations which this world can neither give nor take away. The sacrifices that must be made to holiness and rectitude of life are painful indeed to a corrupt mind; but

in comparison of those which are made to pleasure, and ambition, and all that appears good in the eyes of men, they are momentary and light, and lead in the end to that rest which remaineth for the people of God. This rest is worthy of our labour, and the hope of entering into it after this life is at an end, sweetens every sorrow, and alleviates every pain. The triumphs of religion are thus sung by the prophet Habakkuk: "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine; the blossom of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls. Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." Thus the Christian walks through the wilderness of this world, leaning upon the rock of his salvation; and thus all his ways are ways of pleasantness, and all his paths peace. He puts his trust in the Lord, and the Lord inclines his ear unto him, and hears his cry. He brings him

S E R M O N IV. 69

up, also, out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay. The floods of affliction shall not overwhelm him, for the Lord is his hiding place; he preserves him from trouble: he compasses him about with songs of deliverance. And thus, in his most despondent moments, his reason, fortified by faith, chides the vain fears of a clouded imagination. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance *." If we thus compare the consolations of the Christian, in every fortune, with the feverish, and transient, and vain, and guilty pleasures of those who live without God in the world, we shall find reason to conclude that whoever comes unto Christ finds rest unto his soul even in this life. In the life which is to come the rest of the righteous shall be "more glorious," and the pain and an-

* Psal. xlii. 5.

guish of the wicked shall be increased. The righteous shall then shine forth as the stars in the firmament, elevated above the turbulence of passion, and the fear of sin and death; they will then enjoy the supreme bliss of conversing with the souls of just men made perfect, and with other orders of intellectual beings, who will join with them, and swell the song of praise to him that liveth for ever and ever. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived the happiness reserved for those that fear God; but of this we are assured, that the powers of the blessed in Heaven will be exalted and refined, and that all their desires will be gratified. Such are the consolations that the Redeemer of the world holds out to those that labour and are heavy laden. To them the invitation in the text is addressed, and they only who are sensible of their burthen are likely to accept of it. Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. It is good for
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men to be afflicted: for then, with the prodigal son, they return to their father's house. Their father meets them while yet afar off, and encourages their most distant approaches "Draw near unto me saith the Lord, and I will draw near unto you,"—"Turn unto me, and I will turn unto you; behold I will put my spirit into you." "Abide in me, and I in you." These, my afflicted brethren, are very condescending and very encouraging invitations. They are the chords of love, the bands of men. The Lord invites you to come, to meet him, to dwell with him, and never, never to stray or depart from him in life, death, or eternity. He will be your friend in adversity, your refuge in time of trouble, your comforter and guide in the vale of death, and your portion for ever. "Come, then unto him all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and he will give you rest: take his yoke upon you and learn of him,

for he is meek and lowly in heart*;
and ye shall find rest unto your souls,
for his yoke is easy and his burthen is
light."

* Meekness or freedom from the tyranny of passion is
a lesson that all must learn who would find rest to their
souls,

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S E R M O N V.

The Happiness of Virtue, or Moral Wisdom.

PROVERBS iii. 13—18.

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandize of it is better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain of it than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies : and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand ; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her, and happy is every one that retaineth her.

IN the language of the inspired writers, wisdom is synonymous with virtue, and folly with vice. It is the energy of the intellect, and not, as some modern philosophers

losophers have supposed, any faculty analogous to sense, which discerns the propriety, the justness, the truth, and excellency of moral rectitude on the one hand; and the impropriety, the injustice, falsehood, and deformity of moral turpitude on the other. Virtue, therefore, may properly be termed wisdom in respect of the power which apprehends and approves its nature. It may also be termed wisdom in another respect: it is the most prudent, safe, and glorious course of life; it points and conducts us to the happiest and noblest ends through the happiest and noblest paths. And this is the important truth which it is the object of this discourse to illustrate. "The ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

There are two questions in morals: the one, what is virtue? or what course of conduct deserves the name and the praise of being virtuous? The other, what is the foundation of virtue, or what is the principle,

ciple, the circumstance or circumstances whether of feeling or an exercise of the understanding, which constitutes a virtuous conduct, and distinguishes it from such as is vicious and abandoned? Concerning this last question there are many disputes in the schools. As to the first, all men are very generally agreed, for however nations may differ in local customs and manners, and Christians in ceremonies and abstracted notions concerning certain points of religion, the great and essential outlines of virtue are universally recognised and admired. Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, whatsoever things are worthy of praise *: these command the approbation and esteem of every judgment, and gain the affectionate applause

* Philip. iv. 8.

of every heart. And in the practice of these things, the true felicity and dignity of human nature will be found to consist.

That virtue is happiness, or leads to happiness, and that vice is misery, or leads to misery, is not only placed beyond all doubt by the strong, and repeated, and varied declarations and testimonies of divine revelation, but has been discovered by the observation, and is acknowledged by the universal consent of all mankind, in all nations and ages of the world capable of observing and drawing inferences from different causes of action. Whatever disputes have arisen upon the subject of morals, there has been none about this. Even moralists the most loose and sceptical in their principles admit the grace, the dignity, the utility of virtue; and, charmed with its attractive features, break out in panegyrics on those qualities which all men denominate virtuous.

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If these moralists make utility the foundation of virtue, they nevertheless bear testimony to the truth that the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and that all her paths are peace. Undoubtedly, wisdom, moral wisdom or virtue is of nobler, and even divine origin! but we enter not now into any controversy concerning the foundation of morality. It is sufficient to our present purpose to observe, that men of opposite principles agree in their commendations of virtue. Virtue in the judgment of all is useful and agreeable to ourselves and others.

But that the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and that all her paths are peace, will be more effectually impressed upon our minds and hearts by a nearer and more particular view of virtue, or the leading virtues and graces into which moral wisdom is divided.

The leading, or cardinal virtues, according to a very ancient and comprehensive division

division or enumeration, are, justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude.

Justice, in its most enlarged and true sense, comprehends all the virtues. It signifies, to give to all their due; to discharge the duties of the relation in which we stand to God, to our neighbours, and to the animal creation: it also includes the duties we owe to ourselves. In this comprehensive sense, justice or righteousness, for in the original Greek the word for either is the same, is used in the New Testament in different places, particularly where it is said that Joseph, the husband of Mary "being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example was minded to put her away privily *," as synonymous. In justice to Mary's character, hitherto amiable, pure, and unsuspected, he would not expose her to public shame; in justice to himself he would not consort with

* Matth. i. 19.

supposed impurity; he therefore resolved to put her away privily. Humanity then is an essential part of justice. Justice implies not only the due discharge of what we contract for, or what might be extorted by law, but the exercise of all the social or benevolent affections.

That the paths of justice, in its most limited signification, are both peaceable and pleasant, will sufficiently appear if we only reflect on the common effects of injustice, which, in its more flagrant and violent appearances, leads directly to infamy, confiscation of goods, imprisonment, corporal punishment, and even death.— In other instances, which escape the cognizance of human laws, it draws upon men loss of reputation, distrust, hatred, aversion, and contempt. The honest and upright man, on the other hand, not only escapes open and infamous punishment, but is trusted, respected, and beloved by all around him. And there is nothing more certain than that it is the confidence, the
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esteem, and affection of mankind which are in reality the grand objects of the varied bustle of human life. Wealth and honours derive their great charm from the circumstance, that they raise those who possess them to a degree of elevation from whence they attract the attention, and the sympathy, and the admiration of their fellow-men.

But if there is a degree of respect and attachment shewn even to that lower order of justice which is confined to the strict discharge of what might even be extorted by law, there is a more sublime and sensible satisfaction which attends the exercise of the social and benevolent affections. These are all of them pleasing, and full of delight. Whatever is honourable and fair in human character and conduct, whatever is noble, kind, and generous, takes possession of the heart of every spectator, and animates him to embrace the great and good with the most cordial affection, and to maintain
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their cause. Exalted capacity, undaunted courage, prosperous success; these may only expose the politician or the hero to ill-will and envy: but as soon as the praises are added of humane, merciful, friendly, and beneficent, envy itself is silent, or joins the general voice of applause and acclamation. The man who is the object of this confidence, love, and approbation, enters by sympathy into the feelings of those persons whom he obliges, and those who interest themselves in their welfare. He reflects that he himself is the object of their grateful emotions, and at the same time that his conduct is approved by his own conscience, and, what is greatest of all, by the Almighty and beneficent Author of his being. From the accumulated tide of those mixed emotions which spring up from these circumstances in his mind, he enjoys a satisfaction as much superior to all sensual enjoyment, as the soul is superior to the body, as spirit is to matter, as the Great Governor of the world is to his frail and perishing creatures.

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Let us but duly consider what it is to be a just and generous man. He soothes the declining years of his parents by his pious attachment and dutiful cares. His children never feel his authority but when it is exercised to their advantage. Conjugal attachment depends not, with him, on the fluctuation of passion, but is dignified, cherished, and perpetuated by a sense of duty. He divides the sorrows of his friends, and doubles all their enjoyments. He is a sure resource, as far as his abilities extend, to his domestics and dependents. From him the hungry receive food, the naked cloathing, the vicious advice and encouragement to return to the peaceful paths he pursues himself. Like the sun, an inferior minister of gracious Providence, he cheers, enlivens, and supports all that come within the sphere of his benign influence. Who would not be such a man as this? And what other pleasures are to be compared with the feelings that move
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and agitate the mind employed in acts of beneficence, and conscious of the love and approbation of all intelligent nature? Such a character was Job, who is set forth as an example of a just man, as he appears both in circumstances of prosperity, and of adversity. His condition and feelings in prosperity are thus described: “ When
 “ I went out to the gate through the
 “ city, when I prepared my seat in the
 “ street! The young men saw me, and hid
 “ themselves: and the aged arose, and
 “ stood up. The princes refrained talk-
 “ ing, and laid their hand on their mouth.
 “ The nobles held their peace, and their
 “ tongue cleaved to the roof of their
 “ mouth. When the ear heard me, then
 “ it blessed me, and when the eye saw me,
 “ it gave witness to me: Because I deli-
 “ vered the poor that cried, and the father-
 “ less, and him that had none to help him.
 “ The blessing of him that was ready to
 “ perish came upon me: and I caused the
 “ widow’s heart to sing for joy. I put on

“righteousness, and it clothed me : my
“judgement was as a robe and a diadem.
“I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I
“to the lame. I was a father to the poor :
“and the cause which I knew not I search-
“ed out.”

This just man, in the mysterious course of Providence, was reduced to poverty and affliction, and, what is hardest of all to be supported by a generous spirit, to be made an object of censure, calumny, and reproach even to his friends. But, in every fortune, he held fast his integrity, and the Lord delivered him at last from all his troubles, and exalted him far above even the highest pitch of his former prosperity and honour. And thus will the Righteous Judge and Redeemer of the World, sooner or later, in this or in a future state, redeem the soul of every just man from all sorrow, and crown him with loving kindness and tender mercies. Though weeping should endure

endure for a while, joy will spring up in the morning.

Justice, as we have already seen, comprehends all the virtues. He who is just, and discharges his duty to God, to his neighbour, and to himself, will be not only honest, faithful, kind, generous, and merciful in all his dealings with the sons of men, but he will also be prudent, temperate, and resolute and determined in the strength of God, to persevere in the paths of virtue. And that prudence, temperance, and fortitude are productive of pleasantness and peace, is very clearly and powerfully illustrated by the miserable effects of inconsideration and sloth, of intemperance, and of yielding to the allurements of pleasure, or being overcome by the threatening aspect of present pain. Wherefore, on the whole, we may most certainly conclude on the principles of sound morality, or observation on human nature, life, and manners, as well as on

those of natural and revealed religion, that the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and that all her paths are peace. For the Lord is a shield to the religious and good man, the glory and the lifter up of his head. He lays him down and sleeps, for the Lord sustains him. He needs not to be afraid, though ten thousands of people should set themselves against him round about. The Lord is his light and his salvation, whom should he fear? The Lord is the strength of his life, of whom should he be afraid?

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S E R M O N VI.

On Sympathy.

ROMANS xii. 15.

*Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep
with them that weep.*

AS a principle of attraction unites the particles of matter, and preserves the harmony of the world ; so a principle of sympathy unites mankind in society. By these attractive powers the wise and good Author of Nature maintains concord both in the natural and moral world ; that nothing might be solitary and unconnected, but that all things, whether material or spiritual, might be conjoined in a system, and co-operate, and tend to universal association. Our Heavenly Father has infused into the human breast a portion of that benevolence which extends to every thing that lives. He has drawn mankind together by the soft ties of social affec-

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tions, and amidst the vicissitudes of this varying scene, recommended them to the protection of one another. Divine benevolence has provided for the afflicted the balm of sympathetic tears, and enlivened human joys by the congratulations of relations, friends, neighbours and acquaintance. Social and cordial sympathy alleviates the sorrows and doubles the enjoyments of life.

There is a connection between natural and revealed religion. The former is not superseded by the latter, but pre-supposed, ratified, and enforced. The Apostle, when, in the words of the text, he exhorts us to rejoice with them that do rejoice, and to weep with them that weep, does not address these divine precepts to hearts of adamant, but to hearts, in the language of the prophet, of flesh ; hearts that naturally re-echo the notes of joy or woe,

It is our present design,

First, To shew that we are formed by nature, as well as called upon by the Christian

Christian Religion, to indulge and exercise sympathy, both with the fortunate and unfortunate.

Secondly, to explain more particularly the manner, and the occasions on which it ought to be exercised. And,

Thirdly, to mention some of those motives to sympathy which are presented to our consideration by sound morality, and above all, by the doctrines and example of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

First, then, it is proposed to shew, that we are formed by nature, as well as called upon by the Christian Religion to indulge and exercise sympathy, both with the fortunate and unfortunate.

That there is a principle in our nature, which interests us in the fortune of our fellow-men, and leads us to grieve at their sufferings, and to participate in their joys, is a matter of fact which is placed beyond all doubt by the universal consent of all nations and ages. In all languages we
meet

meet with words expressive of sentiments of generosity, friendship, good-will, compassion, grief, love, and complacency in the welfare of the beloved object. The most hardened violator of the laws of society, is obedient to the divine monitor within his own breast, who constantly urges him to feel for the distressed of others, and, in some measure to make them his own. The voice of this inward advocate for the distressed is too often drowned, indeed, by the tumults and clamours of violent appetites and passions; but so also is even a just concern for our own interest. If even self-love be overborn by the violence of inordinate desires and passions, it is not to be wondered that a generous sympathy with our fellow-creatures is also overborn. But when the mind is calm and serene, when the man is himself, then the movements of sympathy are felt, acknowledged, and displayed. For who would not, if he could, by a secret wish, unseen and unknown to the world, assuage the
o grief

grief of an afflicted brother, or relieve the fatherless and the widow from distress, and all them who have none to help them? Depraved as human nature is, there is not in mankind any such thing as original and unprovoked malice. Where no interest of our own, fancied or real, interferes, we sincerely wish the welfare of our neighbour. Jealousy, rivalry, envy, and other malignant passions, too often destroy or prevent complacency in each other's prosperity among equals; but the great are well pleased to behold the contentment, and tranquillity, and chearfulness of the lowly orders of men; and these, again, rejoice as heartily at the prosperity of the great: a sufficient proof that sympathy with human joy and misery, is really a part of human nature.

And as the unfortunate and afflicted stand more in need of our sympathy than the prosperous and happy, so it is ordered by the gracious and wise Author of our nature,

nature, that compassion should be a stronger and more active principle than congratulation. The fortunate can support themselves under the indifference of others to their prosperity, though not with any high satisfaction, yet without any poignant pain ; but the distressed require our assistance, and their situation pleads so powerfully for compassion and succour, that even the most avaricious and hard-hearted are afraid to come near to them, lest the power of sympathy should melt them into any act of liberality, or at least that they may avoid the pain of a conflict between the fordidness of their dispositions and a sense of duty. But even the most selfish of mankind eagerly run to snatch the blind and the lame from impending danger, and will take very considerable pains to restore the wandering and crying infant to its disconsolate parents. These observations are sufficient to prove, that there really is in human nature a principle of disinterested benevolence, however weak it may
natu-

naturally be in some, and however it may be clouded and occasionally overpowered in others, by the vapours and storms of passion.

A love of singularity and paradox, and a passion for refinement, have led certain philosophers to affirm, that self-love is the ultimate source of all our affections and actions. According to those reasoners, the purest and most exalted friendship, the sincerest and most tender compassion, with the whole train of affections commonly called generous and good, are only modifications of self-love. We do good to others, say they, because we are happy in doing so : and we relieve the distressed because it is painful to ourselves to behold their sufferings.—In order to refute so unjust a theory, a theory at once so extravagant, and so derogatory to the dignity of human nature and the glory of its Author, it might be sufficient to observe, that a distinction between selfish and social
 affec-

affections is felt and acknowledged by all men. But it does not always happen that errors in moral or metaphysical speculations admit of so clear and logical a refutation as that in question. The nature of every passion or affection is determined by its object : but the social passions and affections have not SELF, but others for their objects ; therefore these passions and affections are not selfish. Why do we call avarice, ambition, covetousness, sensuality, with other passions and appetites, selfish ? Because they are excited by self-love, and refer to *self* as to their cause and object. But what view to *herself* has the mother who wastes her health by tending night and day her sickly infant, and then pines and dies of grief at its loss ? If we credit sacred and profane history, there have been, as there still may be, men who have dared to die for their countrymen : and it is certain, that many individuals have sacrificed their lives to the good of their families. Is all this self-love ?

love? No, truly! Such affections and actions have nothing selfish about them. They are inspired by love to others: they are not selfish, but social.

If God has so constituted us, that we enter by sympathy so sincerely into the joys and sorrows of other men that their joys and sorrows become ours; and if he has annexed so sincere a pleasure to the exercise of social affection that it is justly esteemed an exquisite gratification, a stronger proof cannot be given how much of benevolence enters into our moral nature, and how powerfully we are recommended by our Common Parent to the protection of one another! True it is, that we enter by sympathy into the sentiments entertained of us by those on whom we confer benefits, and also of those who witness our conduct. But it is not a regard to those sentiments that originally prompts, or in all cases influences social affection: and we cannot but admire that benevolent wisdom which fortifies the
power

power of sympathy by a complacency in gratitude, and the love of praise; thus ministering by the strongest impulses of self-love itself, to the various exigencies of mankind.

That the inspired writers pre-suppose the existence of social or benevolent affection is evident, from all those repeated precepts which enjoin the exercise of them, and from that express declaration "that perhaps for a good man some would ever dare to die." God is love, and we were made in the image of God; therefore a portion of love or goodness is infused into our moral nature.

Having thus endeavoured to shew that we are formed by nature, as well as called upon by the Christian religion, to indulge and exercise sympathy both with the fortunate and unfortunate, I come now, as was proposed,

Secondly to explain more particularly the manner and the occasions on which it ought

ought to be exercised. The evangelist John, the beloved disciple and the great preacher of love, in his third general epistle to the churches, says, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed, and in truth." "Let love," says the apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, "be without dissimulation. Be kindly affectioned one to another, in honour preferring one another." This is a lesson of urbanity of manners, and that true and unaffected politeness and delicacy of attention, which is never so pleasing as when it flows really from the heart. In different parts of the sacred Scriptures we are exhorted to exercise fervent charity. St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Colossians, recommending this amiable quality, seems to labour as it were, and to be at a loss for words to express the ardour of that passionate affection which he wishes Christians to entertain for one another. He exhorts the Colossians, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, to put on "bowels of mercies,

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cies, kindness, meekness, long-suffering." Such an affection as influences, as it were the very vital functions, and is well expressed in divers parts of Scripture by that antiquated word, yearning. If sympathy or love be sincere and ardent, it will naturally express itself without instruction. It may, however, be proper for us to observe that religion, as well as morality, admits and teaches that there are certainly objects who have a stronger claim to our sympathy than others: as those of our own household or family; those of the same nation, and those of the same faith. But our love ought to extend even to the stranger, and to the animal creation too, according to the pure morality of the laws of Moses.

We proceed now, in the third place, to mention some of those motives to sympathy which are presented to our consideration by sound morality, and, above all, by the doctrines and example of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

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S E R M O N VI. 99

It is impossible to produce any affection or passion of the mind by a mere volition or wish. The passions are only excited when we attend to their proper objects : and it is by habitual attention to these, that habitual affections and dispositions are produced. If then, we wish to cultivate sympathetic affections, we must, according to the precept of our Saviour, change places in imagination with our neighbour, that whatsoever we would that men should do unto us, we may do even so unto them. Go to the house of mourning ; resort to it often and again. Cast your eyes around on the numberless objects of compassion that walk along with yourselves, as fellow-travellers through this vale of tears. converse with them frequently. Even your friendly sympathy, though you should not be able to remove the burthen, will alleviate the pressure of their affliction. The more you indulge such conversation, the more

you will be inclined to indulge it, for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better: nor will this sympathetic sorrow, while it cures and amends, lacerate and wound the heart. Even when bathed in tears, the tender-hearted and good lament the sufferings they are unable to remove; they feel, in the consciousness of so excellent a frame of mind, a satisfaction far superior to those which arise from sensual indulgence. Like the sun bursting forth from behind a cloud, and shedding his beneficent rays through falling showers of rain, human nature appears in the noblest as well as most amiable point of view, when dissolved into compassion, and shedding tears through smiles.

Sympathy is more forcibly excited, as we have already observed, by distress than by prosperity. Yet if we are not under the improper influence of some malignant passion, we shall naturally feel sympathy,
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and sincerely rejoice at the good of our neighbour. In order to nourish this spirit of congratulation, therefore, we must purge the mind from hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, and envy. These weeds being removed, the seeds of benevolence will spring up and flourish; and bear the peaceable fruits of inward peace and satisfaction, and joy in the favour and approbation of the common parent and Lord of all things.

The motives that press and cordially recommend the duty, and excite the feelings of sympathy among Christians are many, and most affecting. Christians are represented as members of Christ and of one another: and as one member of the body, being afflicted, excites a sympathy throughout all the other members, so the spiritual members of that body of which Christ is the head, ought also to sympathize with one another *. This relation

* 1 Corinthians xii. 12. John's Gospel ch. xv.

between Christ and the members of his mystical body, is recognised by himself in that affecting description which he gives of the last judgment, in the 25th chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew. “ When
“ the Son of man shall come in his glory
“ and all the holy angels with him, then
“ shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.
“ And before him shall be gathered all
“ nations ; and he shall separate them one
“ from another, as a shepherd divideth his
“ sheep from the goats ; and he shall set
“ his sheep on his right hand, but the goats
“ on the left. Then shall the king say
“ unto them on his right hand, Come, ye
“ blessed of my Father, inherit the king-
“ dom prepared for you from the founda-
“ tion of the world : for I was an hun-
“ gred, and ye gave me meat ; I was
“ thirsty, and ye gave me drink ; I was a
“ stranger, and ye took me in ; naked and
“ ye clothed me ; I was sick, and ye visit-
“ ed me ; I was in prison, and ye came
“ unto me. Then shall the righteous an-
“ swer

“ fwer him, faying, Lord, When faw we
 “ thee an hungred, and fed thee? or
 “ thirfty, and gave thee? drink? when faw
 “ we thee a ftranger, and took thee in? or
 “ naked and clothed thee? or when faw
 “ we thee fick or in prifon, and came un-
 “ to thee? And the king fhall anfwer and
 “ fay unto them, Verily I fay unto you, in
 “ as much as ye have done it unto one of
 “ the leaft of thefe my brethren, ye have
 “ done it unto me. Then fhall he fay alfo
 “ unto them on the left hand, Depart from
 “ me, ye curfed, into everlafting fire pre-
 “ pared for the devil and his angels: for I
 “ was an hungred, and ye gave me no
 “ meat; I was thirfty and ye gave me no
 “ drink; I was a ftranger, and ye took me
 “ not in; naked, and ye clothed me not:
 “ fick and in prifon, and ye vifited me not.
 “ Then fhall they alfo anfwer him, faying,
 “ Lord, when faw we thee an hungred, or
 “ a thirft, or a ftranger, or naked, or fick,
 “ or in prifon, and did not minifter unto
 “ thee? Then fhall he anfwer them, fay-
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“ing, Verily I say unto you, in as much
“as ye did it not to one of the least of
“these, ye did it not to me.”

It is impossible for human imagination to conceive any motive to sympathy so powerful as those suggested in this passage of Sacred Scripture. God has implanted compassion in the human breast as the advocate of his suffering children with those who by his providence are more fortunate ; and a general sympathy in all, with the fate and fortune of mankind. Look to the Fountain from whence this balsam of life derives its origin ; reflect on the interest your common Parent takes in the welfare of all his creatures ; consider the final award that awaits the benevolent and humane, and the hard-hearted and cruel. So shall you be induced to put away all strife, and contention, and wrath, far from you, with all malice, to rejoice with them that do rejoice, and to weep with them that weep.

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S E R M O N VII.

On Mercy.

MATTH. v. 7.

*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain
mercy.*

THE sermon on the mount, of which this truth forms a part, may be considered as an introduction to the doctrines and precepts of the Christian religion, and the beatitudes, particularly, as a summary view of the nature and progress of the Christian life.

Our Saviour, as we are informed in the preceding chapter, “ began to preach and to say, Repent ; for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand : ” that is, abandon your former vicious courses which subject you to the judgments of the law, and what you do now through fear, you will soon be inclined to perform from a more exalted principle.

Cease

Cease to do evil, and learn to do well. It is not in your power by any act of your will to inspire your minds with purity of desire, but abstain at least, from acts of wickedness, and just and holy desires will soon be infused, by a baptism mightier than that of water, which reaches only to outward impurities, but touches not the heart: the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which pervades and purifies the whole frame as with the penetrating and diffusive force of fire. After this exordium, as it were, he opens the evangelical dispensation, by a series of divine maxims, in which the natural and the promised blessing or reward is annexed to each; and in which the transition from the one to the other, marks and points out the gradual advancement of the Christian towards holiness, or the perfection of his moral nature.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.” They who are convinced that they have nothing
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to hope, but every thing to fear from the law; they who are poor, and have nothing either in possession or hope that they can call their own, are in a disposition of mind to cast themselves on the grace of God, crying, "Lord save us, we perish." He who stretched forth his hand to save the disciple who thus called out to him, when he began to sink as he walked on the water to go to Jesus, even he in like manner stretches forth his arm to save the poor in spirit; for a sense of his poverty, a conviction that he is miserable, blind, and naked, exposed to present affliction and future woe, produces that penitence and contrition of heart which opens, breaks, moulders, and prepares the soil for receiving the seed of the word. "Blessed, therefore, are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Lamenting and detesting those sinful appetites and passions which formerly hurried him on to many acts of wickedness, and rendered him an object of divine displeasure, and even odious to him-

himself, he shuns what he hates, in future; he checks the first risings of impure desire, he subdues the turbulency of passion, he attains to self-command and serenity of mind; he is weaned, he is indifferent to the vicious pleasures and pursuits of the world; he is no longer led captive by his sins, voluntarily, and without resistance; his animal nature is no longer ungovernable. “Blessed, therefore, are the meek, for they inherit the earth *.”

Delivered from the tumult of evil desires, the Christian, since the mind must always have some subject of attention, and an object of affection and hope, begins to feel and to indulge such desires as are just and pure, and as accord with its spiritual or rational nature, which now begins to predominate. He sees the enormity, the odious deformity of injustice, and all manner of moral turpitude. And

* The earth, the Adamic, or fleshy part of his nature: his appetites, passions, and desires. These he inherits or possesses because he now has dominion over them; which is necessary to, and is the nature indeed of possession.

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though he has not surmounted all vicious inclinations, he desires to surmount them, and to walk in holiness and newness of life. He hungers and thirsts after righteousness. His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night. He is gradually transformed into a similitude to the object of his devout admiration, for what we admire we study to imitate. "Blessed therefore are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." In this struggle between the remains of sin and desires after holiness, he is sensible of the frailty of his own nature, and how much he stands in need of divine mercy to pardon his transgressions, and grace to keep him in every time of need. Conscious of his own weaknesses and wants, he becomes very indulgent and helpful to those of others. As he stands in need of forgiveness himself, at the hands of God, he is ready to extend to his brethren of the human race, that mercy, which he craves from their common parent.

110 S E R M O N VII.

rent. The Lord who is good unto all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works, regards a disposition so just and so amiable with complacency and delight. In their trouble he hears their supplication, and receives their prayer; "blessed, therefore, are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." Such a regular gradation from one state and temper of mind to another, runs throughout the rest of the beatitudes. It is only to our present purpose to observe, that a merciful, humane, and beneficent disposition, is among the characteristics of every son of God. It is a stage, if we may say so, in the pilgrim's progress to the new Jerusalem; it is inspired by the objects with which he is conversant, by his wants, his infirmities, his fears, his hopes, his joys and sorrows.

In discoursing farther on the subject of our text, I shall first shew what it is to be merciful. And,

Secondly, shew the certainty and the blessedness of the merciful obtaining mercy.

First,

S E R M O N VII. 111

First, I am to shew what it is to be merciful. Mercy is a branch of that sympathy or brotherly affection which is so powerfully recommended by the law of nature, and enforced by the precepts and motives of revealed religion. It is distinguished from pity, tenderness, compassion, and humanity, on the one hand ; and from forgiveness of injuries, on the other : For pity, tenderness, compassion, and humanity may be, and are exercised to the distressed of every kind ;—but mercy only towards those on whom we have some claim, real or imaginary ; and from whom we might, according to the rigour of law, and with some semblance of justice, exact some recompense or service, or on whom we might, according to the rigour of law, and with some semblance of justice, impose some punishment. In this respect, therefore, mercy is a-kin to that spirit of forbearance and forgiveness, which is so warmly inculcated on all christians by the
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whole tenour, as well as by so many particular precepts of the gospel. But it is distinguished from the spirit of forgiveness, first, in that forgiveness has a reference to injuries, and secondly, in that forgiveness may be the effect of a certain elevation and greatness of mind, which overlooks an injury in the contemplation of some great object which engrosses the whole soul, as well as of tenderness and compassion : whereas mercy is exercised towards those who have done us no injury ; and that, not from magnanimity or elevation of spirit, but from tenderness and compassion. Mercy, then, may be defined to be, a disposition to remit oppressive claims from motives of pity.

We shall illustrate the precise nature and import of mercy, by some passages of scripture, which not only tend to give a clear and distinct notion of that amiable disposition, but also to inspire it.

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It is truly said in the Book of Psalms, that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all his works. This truth, so full of comfort, is beautifully and sublimely typified by the construction and the use of the mercy-seat, of which we have an account in the Book of Exodus. It was made of gold, and at its two ends were fixed two cherubims of the same metal, which, with their wings extended forward, seemed to form a throne. Under this mercy-seat was placed the ark of the covenant, in which the tables of the law were deposited :—" And thou shalt put the mercy-seat above upon the ark, and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee, from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the Children of Israel." From this glorious

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emblem of mercy, the Lord in mercy spoke to his people, and to all mankind ; and as he was ready to shew mercy to them, he commanded and entreated them, by every motive that could touch their souls with pity, to shew mercy to one another. " Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him : For ye were strangers in the Land of Egypt. Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword ; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless. If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury. If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down*."

* Exod. xxii. 21—26.

S E R M O N V I I . 115

“ Six days shalt thou do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest : that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thine hand-maid, and the stranger may be refreshed†.”

“ When ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of the field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard : thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger : I am the Lord‡.”

“ If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren, within any of thy gates, in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother. But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a

† Exod. xxiii. 12.

‡ Levit. xix. 9, 10.

thought in thy wicked heart, saying, the seventh year, the year of release is at hand ; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought, and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest him, because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto*.”—But the passages of scripture in which mercy triumphs over might, and those laws which the great and powerful, in whose hands the government of nations is placed, are apt to make in favour of themselves, to the prejudice of the poor and needy, are so many, that we cannot here particularly enumerate them. There is, however, a parable of our Saviour’s so apposite to the subject in hand, that it cannot be passed over in silence. It is the parable of the

* Deut. xv. 7—10.

compassionate lord, and unrelenting servant, to which I allude, which is recorded in the eighteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. "The Kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a certain king which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him which owed him ten thousand talents : but, forasmuch as he had not to pay, his Lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant, therefore, fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

"But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him an hundred pence : and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me and I will pay thee all. And he would not, but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told their lord all that was done. Then his lord after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant! I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

With regard to the certainty, and the blessedness of the merciful obtaining mercy, which was the second thing to be illustrated, we need only to observe, tha
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the promises made to the merciful man in the word of God, are numerous, clear, strong, affecting, and often repeated. The interest that the Almighty takes in the poor and needy, and consequently the complacent approbation with which he regards the disposition to mercy, is pathetically set forth in the passages already quoted from those laws which the Lord dictated to Moses, and in the parable of the generous lord and cruel servant. Still more strongly, if possible, is the divine compassion for the distressed part of mankind displayed in such testimonies as these: "He that oppresseth the poor, reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him, hath mercy on the poor *." "Who so mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker †." "Who so stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard." Thus the favour of God to the merciful man may be inferred

* Prov. xiv. 31.

† Prov. xvii. 5.—xxi. 13.

from his detestation of the cruel. The express and direct declarations of that mercy will be shewn to the merciful, are not less strong and affecting. "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve and keep him alive, and he shall be blessed upon the earth, and thou wilt not deliver him into the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness*." Even men, depraved as they are, approve and love the humane and merciful, and would gladly, if they could, redeem the just and good person from all his distresses. How much more will the Lord, for Christ's sake, hear the prayer of the merciful, and receive it? "If we, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto our children, how much more, as our Saviour reasons, shall our Father which is

* Psal. xlii. 3.

is in Heaven give good things to them that ask him †?" If we, for thus we are authorised in like manner to reason, cordially sympathize with the sufferings of good men, how much more shall the Father of spirits regard with complacency and delight, those good dispositions which his own spirit and word inspire? But to be an object of complacency and delight to the Supreme Being, this is the summit of human felicity and glory. And as it is the nature of complacency and delight to be bounteous to their objects, so we may conclude from reason, what we are so strongly assured of by revelation: that God will withhold no good thing from them that fear him and keep his commandments. "Blessed therefore are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

† Matth. vii. 2.

is in heaven give good things to them
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S E R M O N VIII.

On Oeconomy.

JOHN VI. 12.

When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.

A Great multitude having followed Jesus beyond the sea of Galilee or Tiberias, he said unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread that we may eat? and this he said to prove him; for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, two hundred penny-worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here which hath five barley-loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? and Jesus said, make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in
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the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed to his disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. It was upon this occasion that our Saviour, in order to give a memorable lesson and example of the virtue of œconomy, said to his disciples, in the words of our text, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." He that had the power of creating food for thousands, thus intimated that he had not come to subvert the usual course of nature, according to which men earn their bread by laborious industry; and that, although he had now wrought this miracle for their preservation, the doom pronounced on the progenitor of mankind was that "he should eat the herb of the field, and bread only in the sweat of his face, until he should return to the ground from

whence he was taken *." Since therefore, labour or industry of some kind or other, of body or mind, is necessary to most men, in order to be supplied with the means of decent livelihood, it follows of course, that frugality is a duty as much as industry. For, to labour without frugality is to labour in vain; as, on the other hand, a strict observance of frugality abridges the toils of industry, eases the burthen of labour, and yet provides for all the wants of nature; and even lays up a fund for the occasional relief of the poor. "There is, says Solomon, that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches †." "A little, says the Psalmist, that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the Lord upholdeth the righteous. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they

* Genesis iii. 18, 19.

† Prov. xiii. 7.

shall

shall be satisfied. The wicked borroweth and payeth not again : but the righteous sheweth mercy and giveth*." If vice sometimes acquires sudden wealth, it as soon dissipates it ; but that wisdom which holds in her right hand long life, and in her left riches and honour, if she hastens not to be rich, is not soon rendered poor ; the same habits of just dealing, of sobriety, temperance, and strict œconomy which produce independence in worldly circumstances, being also sufficient to preserve it. " Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished, but he that gathereth by labour shall increase." The whole tenour of sacred Scripture enjoins industry, œconomy, and frugality. We are commanded to provide things honest, that is, decent and proper, in the sight of all men. He that provides not for his own family, is declared to have renounced the principles of both natural and revealed religion ; to have denied the faith, and to be worse

* Psalm xxxvii. 16—21.

than an infidel. But to these ends frugality is indispensably necessary. Waste, dissipation, extravagance, inattention, and an aversion to prudent calculation, as we see every day by innumerable examples, ruin even the greatest fortunes ; while a wise œconomy, by gradual but sure steps, leads to ease and independence ; provides against sickness and old age, and even lays up a treasure for supplying the wants of others : a treasure which, by being given to the poor, may be lent to the Lord. In this view of the matter we may add an infinite and eternal weight to the Roman proverb “ How great a revenue is good œconomy ? ” “ A good man sheweth favour and lendeth : ” and that he may have it in his power to do so, “ he will guide his affairs with discretion *.”

It has been observed very justly, that as there is a connection between all the arts and sciences, so, in like manner, there

* Psalm cxii. 5.

is a connection between all the virtues. The virtue of œconomy is accordingly recommended to us, not only by the miseries which it avoids, and the blessings which, by the grace of God it ensures, but also by the vices which it shuns, and the virtues which it puts it in our power to practice.

First, a wise œconomy is recommended to us by the miseries which it avoids, and the blessings which, by the grace of God it ensures. The miseries which it avoids are poverty, want, an anxious dependence on a corrupt and unfeeling world, that alarm and dread which must seize the soul of every parent, and every husband, or in general, every humane master of a family, married or unmarried, when in the hour of sickness, or at the approach of death, he recollects that his former foolish extravagance, and thoughtless dissipation, or, perhaps, vicious excesses, have exposed those who are dear to him, who depended upon him, and had a claim

claim to his protection, to the rigours of torture, to the ingratitude, insults, and contemptuous treatment of acquaintance, neighbours, and even relations, who may too probably regard them with the usual aversion and disdain, which are the common lot of the unfortunate, the forlorn, and the necessitous. In those moments of tender anguish, waste, dissipation, extravagance, and inattention to circumstances, are stripped of the false and gaudy colours of an easy and unconstrained gentility of manners, and generosity of conduct, and appear as they really are, as so many poisoned arrows which stick fast in the human heart, when it is too late to draw them out: which marr our comfort when we stand most in need of consolation, and entail sufferings on innocent babes, and others who looked up to us, perhaps, as the staff of their age, and their refuge under all human calamities.

The blessings which a wise œconomy, by the grace of God ensures, are easy cir-

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cumstances, tranquillity of mind, the necessities and comforts of life, the pleasure of providing for children and other relations and dependents, that of exercising hospitality, of affording relief to the distressed, and in general of being in some measure subservient to the promotion of piety and virtue. But these observations fall under the second consideration by which a wise œconomy is recommended to us : the vices which it shuns, and the virtues which it puts it in our power to practice.

When, by means of dissipation and waste, men are brought down from the rank in society to which they were either entitled by birth, raised by fortune, or had aspired through vanity, the independence of their minds, the loftiness of their spirits is brought down also. They are under the necessity of condescending to the parasitical arts of submission, and adulation of the great, who now, in their adversity, begin to shun their company.

Repeated evasions, and denials that his former friend and constant guest is at home, announce to the humbled man of gaiety and fashion how unwelcome his visits are to his acquaintance. The hope of relief from the patronage of the great and powerful fails. The frowns of want become more formidable, and his arrows more piercing. Vice at first, in some shewy and plausible disguise, offers in such sad circumstances, to take the unfortunate and foolish, unfortunate indeed because foolish, sufferer under her protection. Perhaps, before his mind, unhabituated to any thing low, mean, or wicked, yields to her temptations, he resolves once more to throw himself upon the friendship and favour of some person of whom he has some acquaintance, renowned for his humanity and benevolence. But, alas! he finds that his sufferings are imbittered by contempt. Even men who have the reputation of being generous and good, find pretexts for withholding their bounty, and even their recommendations. "He

is an unhappy and imprudent man ; he is not a person that can be essentially served ; he spent very foolishly, in the course of a few years, an independent fortune ; and he would just act the same part, were it in his power to do so, over again !” Such are the sentiments that occur, and which are pleaded as excuses for refusing succour to the man of dissipation in his necessities.

Abandoned by the circle of his former friends and acquaintance, he again revolves in his mind the suggestions of vice, clothed almost, to his inclining fancy, in the garb of innocence. He betrays trust, in hopes of being able to make good the deposit before it is called for. It is but another step to forgery ; and from thence to theft, robbery.—Here we shall stop, although the career of vice knows no interruption, short of what passion and despair may have urged human nature to perpetrate, or led to suffer.

In the weaker sex, that want which follows dissipation, leads directly to prostitution,

tion, to intoxication, to theft, to a total want of delicacy and shame, to rage, to horror, to despair, and often to a total deprivation of reason, accompanied with blasphemous and horrible imprecations, the last stage of human wretchedness.

A virtuous and wise œconomy on the other hand, puts it in our power to practice many virtues. It produces that tranquillity and independence of mind, which raises a man above many of those temptations, which with too great success assail the forlorn and necessitous. It is friendly to that delicacy, dignity, and propriety of conduct, which are so great ornaments to human nature, and which are recommended both by morality and the Christian religion. It provides for families, friends, and dependents; it puts it in our power to alleviate the miseries of life, and to imitate that mercy which is diffused, and is prominent among all the works and ways of God. It gives room and leisure for human study, and divine contemplation. A mind distracted by the importu-

nity of creditors, or the fear of imprisonment or want, is not at ease to think of sublime and future objects, being pressed and harrassed by the urgency of the moment. Easy circumstances are favourable to that habitual meditation on divine things, which is the duty and the delight of Christians. It may be farther added, on this head, that the pressure of extreme want not only deprives men of the means of ministering to the necessities of others, but even, in some degree of the inclination. The mind that is incessantly beat and buffeted about by the billows of poverty and distress, becomes hardened against commiseration. It is occupied too much with its own, to sympathize with the sorrows of others. Although the experience of past distress inclines the mind to sympathy with affliction, it is certain, that the tumult and agitation of present sufferings, exclude all care for our neighbours, self-preservation being the first law of nature. It may be observed still farther, that an active and regular œconomy is seldom found in conjunction with the habitual

bitual prevalence of any flagrant vice, or violent passion.

There is a very great proportion of mankind, especially in trading cities, in which the habits of traffic have a tendency to produce fordid penury and avarice, to whom all exhortations to frugality are superfluous. The characters who have need of incitement to œconomy, are, first, people of indolent constitutions; secondly, those who are under the influence of some predominant lust or passion; and thirdly, persons who have really a perception of the beautiful and sublime, both in nature and art, and also in moral conduct, but who, from want of reflection, from a very unfortunate and indeed culpable inattention to truth and reason, consider the cares of strict and regular œconomy as unworthy of them, and below the dignity of an elevated mind.

There are persons, I say, who are squanderers from indolence of constitution; these are the sluggards of Solomon, who

put their hands in their bosom, and are loth to take them out ; persons of corpulent and lethargic habits commonly, who roll themselves up in their beds like snails in their shells, shut their eyes against the chearful light of day, which upbraids their indolence, and rouses to activity, saying “ yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep,”—“ On such poverty comes as one that travelleth, and want as an armed man *.” Among the indolent prodigals we may rank those who, for want of calculation, will not suffer themselves to be persuaded, will not take the trouble of giving ear to the chain of irrefragable reasoning, that would convince them of the great power and happy effects of œconomy. Great sums they well know are wasted away in superfluous trifles ; if they would but attend to this, they would be convinced, that great sums might, by parity of reason, be saved by accumulated savings in trifles.

* Prov. vi. 10, 11,

A second class of prodigals consists of persons under the influence of some predominant lust, or passion; drunkenness, the rage for gaming, incontinence, the female passion for fine cloaths and universal admiration, which indeed borders on, and often leads to lewdness, as modest women are indifferent to the attentions of all men but their own husbands; all these and other appetites and passions, hurry their votaries beyond all the limits of calculation, and bounds of discretion. Money, money is to be had at all adventures, at whatever interest the usurer pleases to demand.—Cloaths, furniture, credit, reputation, all are pawned, are sacrificed to giddy fancies, and brutal lusts and passions. “Therefore calamities come suddenly on the profligate and prodigal—darts strike through their livers, they are broken suddenly without remedy.”

I mentioned, as a third species of prodigals, persons who have really a perception

tion of the beautiful and sublime in nature and art, and also in moral conduct, but who, from want of reflection, consider the cares of regular œconomy as unworthy of them, and below the dignity of an elevated mind. Now although it is scarcely possible to move by the voice of reason the indolent mass of lethargic corpulence, to brace the relaxed nerves of effeminate and debauched minds, and to stop the career of appetite and passion; yet with persons who are captivated with the graceful and majestic forms of nature, and virtuous conduct, whether in the originals of external objects and real life, or in the imitations of those by art, there is ground to hope that reason may prevail in a matter so true and so important, as that a wise œconomy is both the duty and the true dignity of man. Is attention to minute objects, in general, a mark of narrow capacity or meanness of soul? It is of individual atoms, it is from organised particles of matter that vegetables, animals, the great globe itself, and
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the spheres of heaven are composed. The great architect of the universe has his eye on the least atom of matter, and the very "hairs of our head are numbered." Such is the divine œconomy of the God of nature! Amidst all the vicissitudes of revolution and reproduction, there is not a fragment or particle of substance misapplied or lost. The Lord of Heaven and Earth is frugal in his means, simple in his laws, and sublime and all gracious in his designs.

Again, does the philosopher who pries into the minute texture of insects or flowers, or the internal mechanism and component parts of larger bodies, lose aught of his dignity by attention to such subtile and evanescent matters? no certainly, but is as respectable when he exposes the mechanism of a fly by the aid of a microscope, as when with a telescope he surveys the planets or the most distant fixed stars. Still farther on this subject, does
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the politician or military commander de-
grade himself, when, by the rigours of
œconomy, he equips a fleet, or raises an
army for the protection of the rights of
mankind, or stands out a siege against his
combined enemies? The end in these cases
ennobles and adds lustre to the means, and
what appears trifling, and of no account
in a single and solitary state, taken in con-
junction with a number of other particu-
lars of the same kind, and in connection
with the end to which they point, seems
most important and great; for œconomy
which saves every unnecessary expence,
however small, enables us to undergo the
greatest when necessity requires. And
if ever an end justified and dignified
means, the ends of independence, justice,
benevolence, freedom from misery and
vice, and the power of being good to all
around us, justify and dignify the virtue
of œconomy. To dissipate one's fortune
from a thoughtless sociability of temper,
like a tree that sheds its fruit at every
breeze, among the worthless as well as
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S E R M O N VIII. 141

the good, and all that come near him, is not a virtue but a vice ; nor yet is there any pre-eminent merit in appropriating a part of a large estate to acts of generosity and compassion. But with one hand to save and gather, and accumulate fragments, and cut off all appetite for criminal self-indulgence and waste ; and with the other to minister liberally to the necessities of the poor : this is praise worthy in the sight of men, and well pleasing in that of the Almighty.

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ing in that of the Almighty.

S E R M O N IX.

On Mercy.

EPHESIANS VII. 18.

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto, with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints.

IT is the great business of the Christian life to recover that moral rectitude, that uprightness of intention and purity of desire, which constitute the true dignity and felicity of human nature, but which are repressed and overborne by evil lusts and passions. The original destination of man, was, to resemble his Maker in righteousness and holiness, and to participate in that supreme happiness which is found in the indulgence of just and benevolent sentiments, and in being
free

free from every propensity and wish, but such as it is the pleasure of Heaven to gratify. It is then only that we can become sincerely blessed, when all our wants and longing desires are satisfied, and it is then only that these can be satisfied, when they are such as God, in whom all fullness dwells, approves. It is a just and fine sentiment of one of our English poets that

“ To be virtuous, is to be happy ;

“ Angels are happier than men,

“ Because they are better.”

But there lives not a man who, by any exertion of his powers, can emancipate his mind from the tyranny of sin, and cleanse himself from those mental impurities which descend to us all from our first parents, and are rendered inveterate, and as it were constitutional, by the prevailing force of confirmed habit. As the Ethiopian cannot change his hue nor the leopard his spots, so neither is it in the power of him who hath been accustomed
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to do evil, to learn to do well. Divine grace, in compassion to the infirmity of our nature, offers a supernatural cure to a disease that resists all natural remedies; and if the Christian is called to contend with foes too powerful for flesh and blood, he is clothed with divine armour: and thus weak in himself, he becomes strong in the Lord, and the power of his might. "Wherefore says our apostle*, in the context, take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God: and, in the words of our text, praying

* Ephes. vi. 13—17.

always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints."

In discoursing on the duty of prayer, thus emphatically prescribed as a part of the Christian armour, it is proposed,

First, to illustrate the reasonableness and the efficacy of prayer.

Secondly to consider the manner, and the circumstances in which prayers are to be offered up.

Thirdly, to point out some of those encouragements which invite us to pray.

First, it is proposed to illustrate the reasonableness and the efficacy of prayer. Our Saviour, in giving directions concerning prayer, says to his disciples*: "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the Heathen do: for they

* Matth. vi. 7, 8.

think they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye, therefore, like unto them, for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him." In other portions of scripture we find the divine spirit pressing upon sinful men the mercies of their Redeemer, and in the language of the most tender and compassionate expostulation, pressing them to accept, and chiding them for refusing them: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight in fatness. Incline your ear and come unto me, hear and your soul shall live *." Omniscient as God is, he needs not to be informed; and all gracious and

* Isaiah lv. 1, 2, 3.

merciful, he needs not to be importuned; he knows our frame, he is acquainted with our thoughts while they are yet afar off, and is even more ready to grant than we are to make our requests. Yet, for the mercies he bestows he will be entreated, and he commands us to seek his face, to knock with importunity, to ask with an holy and obstinate zeal, and to pour forth our souls before him in tears of contrition, and godly resolution to live henceforth according to his laws. Prayer is not necessary to bend the Almighty Father of our spirits to compassion towards his creatures: but it is salutary, it is necessary for us; necessary to break, and soften, and prepare our minds for the reception of his heavenly communications, to render them susceptible of devout impression, and fit objects of divine grace. The Spirit of God addresses us, in the sacred Scriptures, in a language conformable to our moral nature; according to the constitution of which, there are some

things which one man has a right to demand from another as a debt due to him in strict justice, and others which he can only implore from his benevolence and compassion. The unfortunate and distressed cannot, without the just imputation of insolence, require in a high and peremptory tone, relief from the bounty of their opulent neighbour. The language of submissive entreaty is proper to their situation; and is indeed a just tribute to that generosity which, exceeding the bounds of strict law and justice, exercises in their behalf the divine prerogative of extending goodness even to those who could not command it by compulsion. The Father of our spirits, whose inspiration gives us understanding, and after whose image the inward man is formed, places himself, in his dealings with the sons of men, in some sort as on a level with them, and teaches them to transfer to their conversation with him, those sentiments of propriety, fitness, and equity,

which ought to regulate their intercourse with their fellow-creatures. If we tremble under a sense of guilt, and an apprehension of deserved punishment, ought we in reason, or can we in fact approach our offended God in any other strains than those of confession and repentance, of adoration, of supplication, of gratitude, and self-dedication to the divine will for the remainder of our lives? such sentiments are natural and just. It is fit, it is necessary that we entertain a just sense of our own situation, and do homage to the divine attributes, before we can become objects of the divine mercy, or participate in the divine favour. If our merciful Creator even presses upon men, as it were, and solicits the acceptance of his grace, he declares at the same time, that it is only with the humble and contrite in heart that he will condescend to dwell, and that while he comforts and exalts the humble, he resists the proud. To suppose that the Almighty should extend those influences
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and blessings to the obdurate soul, equally insensible of its own wretchedness, and the divine perfections, which are communicated to the pious and penitent, would be to suppose something monstrous, absurd, and indeed impossible: for a mind thus sunk in an impious stupefaction, is utterly incapable of receiving those impressions which are necessary to destroy the old man with his deeds, and to create the new man, and raise him to a similitude to the divine nature, and a nearer and nearer communication with his Saviour and his God. Thus it sufficiently appears, that there is nothing in prayer unreasonable or absurd, but that, on the contrary, it is suitable to the moral nature, and necessary to the fallen condition of man.

The efficacy of prayer is demonstrable from its nature, and is proved by the experience of pious minds in all ages of the church. In distress, the heart being softened, and, to use the expressive lan-

guage of the Psalmist, melted like wax in the midst of our bowels, is easily susceptible of every just and good impression. When we tremble alternately between hope and fear, according as we turn our eyes to the amiable, if I may say so, or awful perfections of the divine nature, the whole soul is called into exertion : every power is exercised, and every pious and virtuous emotion excited. Faith is strengthened in all her exercise, and objects spiritual and future brought home and impressed upon the mind, with all the energy of objects that are sensible and present. The gulf of space and time, which human imagination interposes between mortals and the omnipresence of God, is removed, and we stand immediately in the presence of God. Assurance of that forgiveness for past offences, and divine aid in our endeavours to bear up, for the future, against all temptations and the infirmities of our corrupt nature, raises us, for the time, above ourselves, and
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clothes us with divine strength. Supported by the presence of God, manifested by the eye of faith, martyrs and confessors have in all ages and nations of the church, braved the fury of their persecutors, and exulted in the midst of torments, and welcomed death, the king of terrors. And here let the unbelieving world acknowledge the power and the truth of the Christian dispensation: for what is there in human nature that could thus enable it to triumph over itself, and overcome its first law, the love of life? But let this matter be appealed from the history of saints, martyrs, and confessors in remote places and times, to the personal experience of every sincere Christian. When temptation assails you, and frail nature begins to yield to the allurements of vice, then, then in that critical moment, retire from the world, shut yourself up recollected in the closet of your heart, and pour forth your weakness and your wants to God in prayer. He who pre-

preserved the apostle sinking, as he walked to him upon the fluid surface of the waters, will also preserve you, and support you amidst the surrounding billows of evil appetites, desires, and passions. If you only feel your disease you are thus certain of the cure, since the ear of the Lord is not waxed gross that he cannot hear, nor his arm shortened that he cannot save.

I proceed now to the Second thing proposed, which was, to consider the manner, and the circumstances in which our prayers to God are to be offered up. All scripture is full of repeated instructions on this head, repeated, varied, and enforced. No time, no place, no company, no situation whether of prosperity or adversity, is unreasonable for the exercise of prayer: since at all times, and in all places, we are exposed to temptations; and that in prosperity we are apt to forget God, and, in adversity, either to despond, as those who are without hope, or to seek relief in forbidden paths, and to have recourse to
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S E R M O N IX. 155

the refuge of lies. We are exhorted to pray always, to pray without ceasing, to pray fervently, and not doubting of receiving a favourable answer. That we may pray with the greater advantage our Saviour directs us * "to enter into our closet, and when we have shut the door, to pray to our Father which is in secret." We ought literally, if opportunity serves, according to our Saviour's precept, and example too, when we pray, to retire to some secret place, and abstracting ourselves from all objects of sense, intensely to fix our minds on our own wants, and on him who is able to supply them, and also on the reasons that we have to be confident that our prayers will not be poured forth in vain. In the busy and crowded walks of life, we are to retire into the closets of our hearts, and to pray to the invisible but omnipresent Father of our spirits, who is present to the inmost

* Matth. vi. 6.

recesses of our minds, and knows what things we have need of even before we ask him. There is a particular circumstance mentioned in our text, which claims our particular attention: "Praying with all supplication in the spirit."—The bodies of men are not more dependent for their existence on physical nourishment, than the souls of men are for theirs on the secret and incessant operation of the Father of their Spirits, which gives them understanding. But the spirit of God is, in an especial manner, present to the minds of the Christian. Our Saviour, speaking of the observance of the divine commandments, and of prayer so necessary to that observance, says to his disciples, "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide

abide with you for ever ; even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him : but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."

Here is an express declaration that the Spirit of God is present to the mind of the disciple of Christ, and, as it were an appeal for the truth of this to his effects

"But ye know him *." Now compare

this with that other scripture where it is said, that in prayer "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us, by groans which cannot be uttered," and you have

an explanation of our text. The Holy Spirit, in sincere prayer, prompts, excites, prolongs, and invigorates those sentiments which, through his energy, seem to flow spontaneously from the heart alone of the suppliant. What irresistible encourage-

ment to prayer ! almighty God declares his readiness, his desire, his delight in

* John xiv. 14—17.

hearing

hearing our prayers—Jesus, the son of God invites us, if I may use a common, but expressive phrase, to make use of his name, and to put up our petitions to his Father and our Father, to his God and our God, for his sake; and the Holy Spirit, the coadjutor and comforter, prompts and dictates our very prayer, by calling to our minds the words and the promises of our Lord, and inspiring us with an ardent and lively faith. More encouragement it is not possible for man to receive to approach his Maker; and this would urge us on to our Third head, to point out the encouragements which invite us to pray: but this will furnish a very wide and interesting field of discourse itself. In the mean time it is necessary that we advert to two other particulars relating to prayer, mentioned in our text, namely, that we are to “watch thereunto with all perseverance;” we are to watch the wanderings and errors of our hearts, that make prayer fit and necessary; and also to have fixed
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and stated times of prayer agreeably to the examples proposed to our imitation in Scripture. These examples recommend private prayer. There are also fixed times of public and social worship, which needs not any illustration, in which we are, agreeably to the precept in our text, to "pray with supplication for all saints." This indeed relates, too, to private prayer, as we may learn from the private prayers of our Saviour, recorded by the evangelist John; but it seems to have a more particular reference to the public and social worship of the Christian churches.

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and stated that of prayer regularly in
the examples of prayer in the
Bible. These examples are divided
into public prayer. There are also found
times of public and social worship which
needs not any distinction, in which we
are, according to the precept in our text,
to "pray with supplication for all names."
This indeed relates too to private prayer,
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of our Saviour, recorded by the evangelists.
It seems, but it seems to have a more
particular reference to the public and so-
cial worship of the Christian church.

S E R M O N X.

Encouragement to Pray.

EPH. vii. 18.

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto, with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints.

IN discoursing on these words it was proposed,

First, to illustrate the reasonableness and the efficacy of prayer.

Secondly, to consider the manner and the circumstances in which prayers are to be offered up.

Thirdly, to point out some of those circumstances which invite us to pray.

Having already treated of the two first, it is my present design to discourse on the last of these heads. We are invited to approach the Lord of Heaven and Earth, under the encouraging idea that he is our Father, our Heavenly Father, able and

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willing

willing to remove all our diseases and pains, and to supply all our wants. Although the Eternal One be free from those turbid emotions which accompany and mix with human affections, yet, by the similitude of parental tenderness, the spirit of God emphatically represents how desirous he is to grant us whatever is conducive to our spiritual excellence and perfection, and our eternal happiness. And if the compassion which the Almighty Father of our spirits shews towards his penitent children, differ in some respects from the yearning of earthly parents towards the children of their bowels, it is equally, nay it is more ardent and constant. For not only are we instructed by the royal Psalmist, that like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him, but that even the feelings of a parent afford an imperfect adumbration only of that tenderness with which the Father of Spirits embraces every soul that humbles itself before him, and pours out its wants
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In prayer and supplication. "Ask, says our Saviour, in the seventh chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your Father which is in Heaven give good things to them that ask him?" Human parents are subject to various passions and infirmities, which render their attachment to their offspring sometimes unsteady, and not to be depended on: Jealousy, partiality for others, and hardened selfishness, or luxurious indolence of disposition, may weaken or overpower and deface the natural feelings of humanity towards those to whom they have been the

means, under God, of communicating existence : and, even if they possess the parental feelings in the highest degree, a blind affection may induce them to indulge their children to their prejudice and ruin, by bestowing gifts not suited to their circumstances and their nature. But with God there is no variableness or shadow of turning. His benevolence flows in a stream that is pure, strong, and constant : and as he knows our frame, and penetrates even into our very thoughts while they are yet afar off, and views the whole dependencies and relations of all things ; he knows what things we have need of, even before we ask him. At the same time, therefore, that he is ready to grant all our just requests, he, like a fatherly physician, will withhold what he knows is not for our good. So far, therefore, from being discouraged at the refusal of certain requests, we ought in all his dispensations to reverence the Divine Providence, being convinced that he will withhold no good thing

thing from them that ask him. "Ye ask and receive not, says the apostle James, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." It is not for the means of worldly gratifications, for satisfying the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, that we are to offer up our prayers to God ; but for spiritual gifts and graces, and particularly for strength to enable us to resist temptations, and to assist us in every time of need. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." If, when we reflect on the repeated, clear, and strong declarations of God that he is willing, nay desirous to communicate spiritual blessings to the humble and contrite, and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness : if,

after revolving those declarations in our mind, we can still waver, and doubt the Divine word so solemnly pledged for strengthening our faith, how unreasonable would it be in us to expect to receive any thing from his bounty. But, on the contrary, if we accept, if we seize, if we close with the Divine offers, then are we as certain that our prayers shall be heard, as we are sure that he is faithful who hath promised, and that Divine truth cannot lie. Could we reasonably doubt that a prince of integrity, or what, in the fashionable language of the day, is called honour, and of a generous disposition and un sullied reputation, could we reasonably doubt that such a character would retract an offer of indemnity to his rebellious subjects after they had thrown down their arms, and with equal confidence and grateful affection thrown themselves on his mercy? Or, to put a case, as the spirit of God has put it in his word, still stronger, could we suppose that an earthly parent would, even with-

without any fancied or real opposition of interest, harden his heart against the solicitations of his clamant and dear children? Oh! no! human nature, a remaining spark of goodness in the midst of depravation and chilling darkness and stupefaction, revolts at such ideas. The Almighty Author of our being appeals in proof of his own sincerity to the generosity of even your own dispositions. “What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or, if he ask him a fish, will he give him a serpent?” Would he mock the irresistible cravings of hunger by that which is not bread? would he, instead of salutary food, give him poison? The Maker and Lord of Heaven and Earth, who is elevated by the supremacy of his nature above all malignant passions, in order to convince you how much he is disposed to promote your happiness, condescends to be judged, as it were, by the common standard of human nature, and requires that confidence in him, which,

depraved as you are, you naturally place in one another. All are not parents, but most people have experienced either the feeling or the effects, and all are daily witnesses of the unbounded generosity and cares of parental tenderness,

Let parents reflect on the emotions that would agitate their hearts and minds on seeing their children supplicating their succour under any misfortune; let children think on the numberless and continued benefits they have received at the hands of their parents; let orphans recall to their minds the generous cares of those into whose hands Providence committed them after the decease of their parents; let all men open their eyes to the beneficence of parents even to undutiful children, and under the impressions that must result from such views, let them say whether they have any reason to doubt of the gracious promises of their Heavenly Father.

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In the present enlightened age, it is as common as it is reasonable, on all subjects, to appeal to experience. In religion as in philosophy, the truth of Christianity, and the certainty of the evangelical promises, may as safely as fairly be proved by this standard. Whatever spiritual grace or comfort the Christian stands in need of, he may draw down, in the moment of despondency, or of conflict with his spiritual enemies, by means of prayer. If he perceives his faith to be faint or wavering, and his mind wandering from the objects and duties of Religion, he has no more to do than to retire from the world, within the closet of his heart, and to make his case known to God by prayer and supplication. He must persevere in these until he receives his answer, in enlivened affections, in animated hope, in strengthened and confirmed faith, until he see the reconciled countenance of God, and hear his voice calling on him in his word to draw near unto him and live.

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What though he lie long at the footstool of the throne of grace before he receive and feel the answer of his prayer? the eye of the Lord is not shut against his humble posture, nor his ear against his imploring voice. But the trying of the suppliant's faith worketh patience: "Let patience, says the apostle James, have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing *." The sinner, in prayer to God, by patience and perseverance, must prepare the soil by harrowing up his soul, for the sowing of the seed of the word, and the influence of divine grace. He must be brought to a sense of his depraved and wretched condition, and as certainly as he perceives himself to sink under the weight of sin, so certainly will he see the hand of the Lord stretched out in the Gospel to save him, "to bring him out of an horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, to set his feet upon a rock, and to establish his goings †."

* James i. 4.

† Psalm xli. 2.

Even that self-commiseration, that retirement and reaction, as it were, of the soul upon itself in circumstances of prolonged anxiety and distress, which, in sensible natures, usually vents itself in tears, that tender frame of mind which will be produced by the reflection that he has been so long excluded from the countenance of God, will prepare the way for the reception of the grace required, and his Saviour in all his offices of prophet, priest, and king be fully manifested to the suppliant, who refuses to part from his God until he grant him a blessing. Thus the kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

Think not that the Lord, in whom compassions flow, will spurn from his presence any humble suitor for relief now that he is exalted a Prince and a Saviour, any more than when he took our nature upon him, and in the land of Judæa went about doing good to the souls and bodies of men, healing the sick and curing

curing all manner of diseases. The miracles that he wrought in the days when he sojourned amongst us, were chiefly designed as an emphatical proof and example of both his power and inclination to relieve all our distresses, to supply all our wants, and to redeem us from the guilt and the consequences of sin, the source of all sorrow, and crying, and pain. Look unto Jesus, then, in the character of the divine physician of souls, and receive comfort and rest to your troubled minds. Walk over with him the scenes of his miracles in Palestine, and place yourself in the situation of those distressed persons to whom he extended his compassion. Your Saviour invites you to make this exchange of situation; obey with joy his gracious call, and join trembling with your mirth. “And behold (as we read in the ninth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew), they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus, seeing their faith, said, unto the

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the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee. And behold certain of the scribes said within themselves, this man blasphemeth. And Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? for whether is it easier to say, thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say arise and walk? But, that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins (then saith he to the sick of the palsy) "Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose and departed to his house." Apply, appropriate to yourselves the comfortable conclusion drawn from this miracle by him who wrought it. Follow the Lord, with his disciples, on the troubled ocean of life, awake him, for even on divine subjects we must make use of similitudes derived from human ideas, awake him like them with your incessant cries, "Lord save us, we perish*;" and with the leper, worshipping him and saying,

* Matth. viii. 25.

“ Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean *.” Press forward with the woman that was diseased, for twelve years, with an issue of blood, to touch as it were, “ but the hem of his garment †.” Cry out with the blind man, and say, “ Thou son of David, have mercy on us ‡.” As none of these supplicants were sent away without obtaining their request, so neither will you. Sincerity and perseverance in prayer will infallibly prevail. In order to impress this truth, the spirit of God has recorded the following transaction: “ Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And behold a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David ! my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil ; but he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away, for

* Matth. viii. 2. † Matth. ix. 20—22. ‡ Matth. ix. 27.

she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord help me; but he answered and said, it is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs. And she said, Truth lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt; and her daughter was made whole from that very hour*." The story of the woman of Canaan insinuates to all sincere Christians, that they are to persevere in prayer, that they are not to be discouraged by a trial, and exercise, and improvement of their faith by patience, but to rest assured that their constancy will at last prevail, and, therefore, as it were, to take no refusal. The instances of divers maladies of body and mind

* Matth. xv. 22 — 28.

cured by our Saviour, present at once to every sinner something similar to his own case or situation, and the strongest encouragement to come with humble boldness to the throne of grace, that he may find grace and help in every time of need.

If any thing could be added to all these encouragements to prayer, as the certain means of drawing down to us the greatest blessings, it might be observed, that it is a great honour for sinful men to be admitted at all times, and on all occasions, into the presence and familiar conversation with the majesty of Heaven. If an earthly monarch admits to his presence and familiarity any of his subjects, he presently becomes the envy of all his neighbours. But how much more honourable is it to converse at all times with the Lord of Lords, and the King of Kings? The duty of prayer too, so far from being any wise painful, is, to every sincere soul, exceedingly pleasant. In all distresses men naturally unbofom themselves to their

their friends, and feel a very sensible consolation in their cordial sympathy and advice, even though they should not have it in their power to afford them any assistance. But our God and Saviour not only sympathizes with our infirmities, and points out the means of relief, but also enables us to lay hold on them and to apply them. If then prayer be profitable, honourable, and pleasant, if, of all the exercises or occupations in which we can be engaged, it be the most profitable, the most honourable, the most pleasant, then are we encouraged, by all that can influence and move the mind of man, to pray always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and to watch thereunto with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints.

S E R M O N XI.

*That the Divine Commandments are not
grievous.*

I. JOHN V. 3.

And his Commandments are not grievous.

TO those who are so unfortunate as to view religion at a distance, and to consider it as a restraint imposed upon our nature, these words of the apostle will appear to contain an unfounded saying. For they are conscious that there is a law in their members warring against the law of their mind; that they are prone to the indulgence of every appetite and passion; that it is easy, and, for a time at least, pleasant to sail down the stream of what is called pleasure; but to oppose, with labouring oars, the gale and current of strong desires, a matter of infinite difficulty, if not altogether impossible. And,

as men are very ingenious and subtle in framing reasons and excuses for whatever they choose to neglect or to pursue, there are who invent several specious pretexts for declining to obey the commandments of God, at least in all their rigour and extent, and endeavour to shelter their disobedience under some theory either of philosophy or religion. Others avoid as much as possible all religious sentiments, reflections, and impressions, from an apprehension that their powers and faculties are unequal to the task which religion prescribes, and a persuasion that their endeavours after obedience would only yield the fruit of present pain, without affording any sure prospect of future advantage. The dissolute want courage, the careless want inclination, to look religion in the face, and behold her heavenly features, which, seen through the mist and prejudice of aversion, appear severe and discouraging; but which, the nearer you approach, without
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losing aught of their native majesty, discover more and more of sweetness, benignity, and divine grace. Unwilling to approach this celestial friend and guide of life, men clothe and veil the deformity of vice under splendid and delusive colours, and embrace a serpent which infuses into their breasts a deadly poison. Could I, with the assistance of God, dispel your mistakes concerning the commandments of God, and tear the veil from that horrid idol that you adore; could I persuade you effectually of the beauty of holiness, and the deformity of sin, of the comforts of the former and the pains of the latter, or, in other words, should I be able to convince you that the commandments of God are not grievous, you would with eagerness and anxiety enter on a religious course of life, and seek with sedulous care for light and strength to direct and support your steps. Seeking these under the lively impressions of awakened faith, you would obtain them; you would go on in the character of pilgrims and strangers

on earth towards the New Jerusalem, rejoicing : you would run without being weary, you would walk without being faint ; and your own experience would soon convince you of the position contained in the text, that the commandments of God are not grievous. It is therefore my intention, at this time

First, to refute some of those reasonings which are adduced, in order to prove that the precepts of the Gospel are grievous, and repugnant to the constitution of human nature.

Secondly, to consider and expose some of those shifts and evasions by which men, who do not call in question the truth of the Christian doctrines, endeavour to excuse themselves from strict obedience to the divine commandments.

First, then, with regard to the arguments adduced in support of the position, that the precepts of Christianity are grievous and repugnant to the constitution of human

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human nature: it is to be observed that the moral doctrines contained in the Gospel, are the same with those enjoined by the principles of natural religion, exalted, extended, and enforced by higher views, and grander prospects; and thus far it must be allowed, that Christianity is a republication of the law of nature. They are interwoven in the texture of our minds and hearts, they are agreeable to the laws or conclusions of reason, they spring up in our consciences, they are warmly urged by that social or sympathetic passion, which links and unites all mankind in one comprehensive chain of good will, and kindly affection, a principle which is universally found to operate where no opposition of interests, either fancied or real, gives birth to the malignant and unnatural passions of hatred, vengeance, and envy. Therefore, it must be allowed, by all men who pay any regard to the principles of morality and natural religion, who reverence the uniform

and unvariable decisions of their own minds, in their cool, deliberate, and happiest moments, that there is not any thing in the precepts of the Gospel, repugnant to the constitution of human nature, or to which all reasonable natures, regulated as they ought to be, would not readily and with pleasure submit. But,

Secondly, it is urged by those who reply against God, that in fact, in the circumstances in which mankind are actually placed, under the frequency of temptations, the violence of passion, and the force of habit, the commandments of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, are grievous and contrary to nature; and why, say they, should the Author of our frame have inspired a degree of appetite or passion, or suffered it to have place in our constitution, that it was not his will to indulge or gratify? This reasoning is of the same kind, and ought to be treated in the same manner, with that of those persons, who, in their wisdom, demand a reason for the
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myfterious courfe of providence and grace, and refuse their affent to all doctrines which they cannot comprehend. There are myfteries in natural as well as revealed religion, and we ought not to reject the one, on account of these, any more than the other. And as the limited extent of our reason ought not to be the measure of our faith, so neither ought the extent of our passions to be the measure of our obedience. Our passions, to a certain degree, are to be indulged; beyond that degree they are to be resisted. If you ask why the Author of our nature ordered matters thus, and imposed on his frail creatures a necessity of resistance, it may be answered, that the ways of God cannot be perfectly comprehended by our limited capacities. Yet, in the present case, we may see a very good reason why creatures who are in a state of trial and probation, should be tried and proved by a conflict between their inclinations and their duty. Is it fitting that the reward should come before that labour and exertion to which alone

alone it is promised, and on which alone, indeed, it can be bestowed ? for the candidates for glory, honour, and immortality, ought in the fitness, propriety, and reason of things to be made perfect through suffering ; though not indeed, like the captain of their salvation, through suffering the wrath of God and the curse of the cross, endurances they are unable to bear ; yet through suffering the light afflictions of that temporary discipline, which is necessary to enliven and invigorate their faith, to prove their fidelity and constancy, to dignify their moral nature, and at once to prepare, and, through the grace of God, to qualify and entitle them to a seat in the mansions of the blessed, among the spirits of just men made perfect.

I am now, in the second place, to consider and expose some of those shifts and evasions by which men, who do not call in question the truth of the Christian doctrines, endeavour to excuse themselves from strict obedience to the divine commandments. And on this head it is to

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be remarked, in general, that this class or denomination of men are characterised by a carelessness, an indolence, a remissness of temper and disposition, which inclines them to rest their hopes of salvation on a partial view of Christianity, on a narrow and false foundation, and which must fail in the hour of trial. They confide in the mercies of God; they turn their attention to the descriptions which the scriptures contain of the divine benevolence; and dwell with satisfaction and security on the promises of everlasting life and happiness to all who believe and obey the Gospel; and by obeying the Gospel, they understand an external and devout compliance with the laws and order of society, and the fixed rules and ceremonies of the church. They violate not the great laws, without the observance of which communities of men could not exist; they give no scandal to their Christian brethren; and, perhaps they resolve, occasionally, to forbear some trespasses against the divine laws in future, which

which they heretofore considered as trivial offences, which God would assuredly overlook or forgive. But men of this character incur, through mere slothfulness and carelessness, those very dangers which the bold infidel draws on himself by his presumption; and, by mere neglect, lose what others forfeit by daring impiety. It is true that the mercies of God are very great, but they are so only to those who fear him, and who join trembling with their mirth. The same authority which teaches us that God is good, teaches us also that he is just: and therefore there is as much reason precisely to tremble at the threatnings, as to repose confidence in the promises of the Gospel. Whoever, therefore, would enter into that rest which remaineth and is promised to the people of God, must fight the good fight of faith, must labour to enter into that rest, must run, wrestle, press forward to the mark, and work out his salvation with fear and trembling. It is not in a distant,
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cold, and unaffecting survey of the duties prescribed in the Gospel, that the easiness of the Christian course consists; it is not in this sense that the commandments of God are said not to be grievous: no, the Christian must bring them home to his own breast, he must feel the stings of guilt and repentance, he must, by a purification painful to sense, be renewed in the spirit of his mind; he must mortify the deeds of the body; his old man, in the emphatical language of the apostle Paul, his earthly and corrupt nature, must decay and die; and thus his new man, or spiritual nature, will be proportionably quickened and revived. Thus quickened and revived, the Christian will acknowledge that the commandments of God are not grievous, and will place his delight in them, and meditate thereon day and night. Again, men of the character just described, who from negligence and sloth entertain false notions of the attributes of God, and of the Christian dispensation, although, when their attention is summoned, they

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may easily allow the truth of all that is here insisted on, are nevertheless apt to suppose that the commission of any sin is not, after all that has been said, a very serious matter, as God is ever ready to forgive, and to listen to the prayers of those who confess their transgressions. They, therefore, are very ready to procure present enjoyments, by charging them to the account of some forms of future penitence. Now there is not a more dangerous, nay there cannot be so dangerous a delusion in the breast of any Christian as this. "What, exclaims the apostle Paul, shall we say then? shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein? know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, that, like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk

walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin*." Again "What then shall we sin, because we are not under the law but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness †?" The reasoning, in this and other passages of Scripture to the same purpose, is abundantly clear and satisfactory. If any man, presuming upon the grace of God, resolves to indulge himself in sin, he reasons absurdly, and acts with desperate folly. For to those who are after the flesh, and do mind the things of the flesh, and resolve so to do, the

* Rom. vi. 1—7

† Rom. vi. 15, 16.

promise of salvation is not made. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace; because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. If men live after the flesh, they shall die. It is only they who through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, that shall live; these are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God, and they receive not the spirit of bondage again to fear, but that of adoption, whereby they cry Abba, Father. They draw near to God with an humble and holy confidence, as children to a father able and ready to succour and comfort them. They hunger and thirst after righteousness, and he satisfies them with such communications of spiritual grace and favour, as give them the victory over all his and their enemies, and as open to their views the beauty of holiness or moral rectitude, as strengthen all the faculties of their soul, and gradually

ally elevating them above the things of time and sense, place their affections on those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. For they are dead to this world, and their life is hid with Christ in God. They therefore mortify their members which are upon earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness. They divest themselves of anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication, and lying. And they put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing and forgiving one another, even as Christ forgave them. Above all things they put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. The peace of God rules in their hearts. The word of Christ dwells in them richly in all wisdom. They teach and admonish one another in Psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in their hearts unto the Lord. Thus they fulfil the com-

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mandments, and they find by experience that his commandments are not grievous. To love God, and be children of God, to feel the influences of devotion and charity, to be heavenly-minded, compassionate, kind, humble, meek long-suffering, and of a forbearing, forgiving, and charitable disposition, is undoubtedly a more pleasant situation or temper of mind in itself, besides that it conciliates the favour of God and man, than to indulge, or rather to fall a prey to the discordant passions of anger, wrath and malice, calumny, lying, and back-biting. The mind, the intellectual, rational, or spiritual part of our nature, in the service of God, is at perfect liberty, and pursues the course in which, when emancipated from the chains of animal appetite and sense, it naturally delights. The malignant passions, and unjust, are painful when felt, and attended with compunction and remorse when gratified. To obey the laws of God, is

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to be free and to be happy ; it is to exercise the noblest, the ruling part of our nature ; it is to enjoy peace of conscience, joy in the favour of God, and in the hope of future glory and immortality. An unregenerated mind pants indeed after gross and sinful gratifications, as a sick and disordered appetite longs for nauseous and pernicious foods ; but a mind rightly composed and properly informed, would certainly choose the paths of duty, as being also the paths of pleasantness and peace.

But, it may be said, that, although to a religious and well-disposed mind, the virtuous is the happiest course, yet to a mind vitiated by evil habits and desires, the Commandments of God are extremely grievous. It must be allowed that Christians enter into life by a strait gate, and that their first outset on their journey towards Zion is not unattended with pain and difficulty : but the more they advance, they find their course the more pleasing, agreeably to

those allegories in which moralists have very emphatically set forth the conflicts of a great mind chusing the arduous paths of virtue, in preference to the flowery walks of pleasure, which terminate at last in distress and ruin. But even in the midst of his painful conflicts with the depravity of his nature, the Christian has the unspeakable consolation of reflecting with satisfaction, complacency, and joy, on the wisdom, and the glory of the arduous course on which he has entered. He rejoices in the strength of God, which enables him to persevere, and considers every temptation resisted, every hour and day spent agreeably to the laws of God, as a pledge and security that he shall at last be enabled to finish his course with joy. If he submits to pains and toil, he does not "spend his money for that which is not bread; and his labour for that which satisfieth not.—He hearkens diligently unto the spirit of his God, he eats that which is good, and his soul delights in fatness."

ness." In every human pursuit there is anxiety, difficulty, and danger of disappointment. In the pursuit of glory, honour, and immortality, there is vigilance, constancy, and care, but an absolute certainty of success. And this circumstance is sufficient to animate the candidate for Heaven with alacrity and joy in every situation, and fully proves the position in our text, that the Commandments of God are not grievous. Cast your eyes abroad on the cares, and dangers, and toils that divide the men of this world : survey the labours and the sufferings of the candidates for worldly honours ; the patience and perseverance, and self-mortification of those who are engaged in the pursuit of wealth ; and the sacrifices of health, fame, and fortune, that are daily offered up at the shrine of sensual enjoyment ; and say, after this review, if there be aught in the observance of the laws of God so grievous, as what is every day encountered by the sons of

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pride,

pride, of avarice, and pleasure? There is not more energy or vigour of mind requisite to the fulfilment of the Divine laws, than is displayed in the ordinary pursuits of mankind. Why then should men pay the price, and yet forfeit the purchase? Why should they spend their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not? The men of this world, who live without God and without religion, are bound in chains to a tyrannical, an ungrateful, and a cruel master. The law of liberty in Christ Jesus sets the captive free, and delivers him from the law of sin and death. Let us submit to this law: let us break the bands of the evil one asunder, and cast away his cords from us. God will accept our sincere though imperfect endeavours; and we shall certainly find that, in our progress towards the New Jerusalem, he will guide and support our steps, and strengthen us when falling, or raise when fallen. There is nothing required on our part beyond what we are able to perform, nothing to
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be submitted to but what will be found tolerable at first, and at last easy and delightful. The wages of sin are misery and death. Let us enter into the service of him who offers as the reward of our obedience eternal life. His commands we are assured are not grievous : and surely, in all events, it is worth our while to make the experiment. The word of God, and the testimony of the faithful, prove that his yoke lies easy, and his burthen light : let us also prove it by our own experience.

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 own experience.

S E R M O N XII.

On the Forgiveness of Injuries.

EPH. IV. 31, 32.

*Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger,
and clamour, and evil-speaking be put away
from you, with all malice ; and be ye kind
one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving
one another, even as God for Christ's sake
hath forgiven you.*

THE malignant passions of mankind are the source of more than half the calamities and vexations that afflict human life. They are painful in themselves, and pernicious in their effects. They disturb the tranquillity, they tear and wound the breast in which they prevail, and inflict numberless evils on the persons against whom they are directed : injuring their reputations, obstructing their laudable pursuits, and sometimes breaking forth

forth into outrageous acts of violence and cruelty, which, re-acting on the unhappy men by whom they are committed, embitter their lives, or cut them off by premature and ignominious death. But if men would banish from their minds all bitter and discordant passions ; and sincerely cultivate, cherish, and practise mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, forbearance, and forgiveness, they would promote their own peace and happiness, they would alleviate the miseries of others, and co-operate with the benignant Author of our being in his plans of peace and good-will towards mankind. If, in all of those circles or societies into which nations of men are subdivided by relationship, by neighbourhood, by business, acquaintance, and the various intercourses of life, if in each of those circles nothing should be found but the most perfect sincerity, justice, and mutual benevolence, how greatly would human ills be reduced, and how happy a change would be

be wrought on the face of this world? Though all tears can never be wiped away from our eyes, or sorrow eradicated from our hearts, while the weakness of our frame subjects us to accidents, disease, and death; yet surely were we all of us inspired, as it were, with one soul, according to the gracious designs and views of the Christian faith, were we all united in true amity, and confederated against the ills which surround us all, we should live in a degree of peace and comfort to which we are at present strangers. The anxieties and cares of emulation and ambition would cease: the stings of malice would neither wound ourselves nor others: the turbulence of anger would not discompose our own tranquillity, or urge us to deeds of repentance and shame. We should live like children in one family, loving and beloved. The kindness that we should be ready to shew to others, we would expect with confidence from all around us. Charity, with her broad and kindly mantle,

tle, would hide us all from those malignant shafts which we now, alas ! too often aim at one another, and protect us from those storms and tempests of passion which cloud our understandings, and distract our hearts. Benevolence to one another would be exalted into a love of that divine Being who is the common parent and redeemer of us all ; and charity and piety united in one stream, would swell and expand our souls to that purity and sublimity of affection, which both qualifies and disposes to converse with God, which is the great object of all religion. Such a state of society, we are assured, will one day be realized in a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. “ When the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed ; their young ones shall lie down together ; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and

and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cocatrice den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea *."

To such a state of purity, simplicity, and innocence, shall the progress of divine knowledge advance the church of God, before the second appearance of the Redeemer and the Judge of the world. Then shall men unbosom themselves to one another without reserve, and speak the truth in love. Thus they shall "grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in

* Isaiah xi. 6, 7, 8, 9.

love."

love *." This, then, being the great end, and object of the Gospel, to purify mankind from all iniquity, and to unite them in love to God and one another, the apostle exhorts the Ephesians, and with them all who profess to be the disciples of Christ, to be "renewed in the spirit of their mind, and to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Such a renovation of mind is the great work in which the Christian is employed, and in this he is assisted not only by the word, but by the spirit of God. The apostle conjures us not to resist the solicitations and impulses of this divine monitor and assistant, and using an expression which most emphatically insinuates to our hearts the divine love, he entreats us not to "grieve the holy spirit of God, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption." That we may walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, that we may not grieve

* Ephesians iv. 15, 16.

the spirit of God, he repeats his exhortation which he had so often inculcated, and which he had but just made at the beginning of this chapter, that we may walk in all "Lowliness, meekness, and long suffering, forbearing one another in love. This last mentioned duty of forbearance and forgiveness, he recommends and presses upon us in the words of our text, by the very affecting consideration "that God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us:" from the same consideration he presses the duty and forgiveness of injuries of the Colossians. Having warmly recommended mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, he at last mentions forbearance and forgiveness. "If any man have a quarrel against any:" adding as if peculiarly concerned, that Christians should above all things dismiss and banish all ideas of revenge, "even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye *."

* Coloss, iii. 13.

The vast and distinguished importance of the duty of forgiveness, is declared by that comment which is made on the fifth petition in the Lord's prayer, by our Lord himself, the only comment that is made on any of the petitions, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive your trespasses *." Let us,

First, enquire into the nature and extent of this important duty, the forgiveness of injuries. And,

Secondly, consider some of the motives by which it is recommended.

A feeling of resentment, on any great and just provocation is natural to mankind, and inseparable from the human frame. As benefits received are the natural objects of our gratitude, so injuries are the natural objects of our resentment. It is not there-

fore the emotion or feeling of resentment that is reprehended, but the passion of revenge. If we have received injuries, we cannot but feel resentment; but what we are commanded, is, never to suffer this feeling to settle in deep and fixed revenge. The apostle, in the context, says, "Be ye angry, and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath *." Our Saviour, who knows our frame, denounces divine judgment not against whomsoever is angry, but against him who is "Angry with his brother without a cause †." Nor, if our anger is not without a cause, ought we to indulge, prolong, or carry it into hostile resolutions against its object. "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift ‡." Occasions of quarrel may happen, but our quarrels should not be per-

* Ephes. iv. 26.
23, 24.

† Matth. v. 22.

‡ Matth. v.

petuated. "Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him—love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.*." "If our brother offend against us again and again, still we ought to forgive him, and that cordially †." It is not uncommon for men to say, "Well, I will forgive, but I shall not forget him, I shall not see him any more, I will have nothing more to do with him." This is but a suspicious and cold forgiveness; this is not that forgiveness which is recommended by the Son of God. Does God forgive men, and then banish them from his presence? "Depart from me ye cursed!" is the doom pronounced on those reprobate spirits which are destined to dwell in everlasting burnings, prepared for the devil and his angels.

* Matth. v. 44.

† Matth. x. 22—35.

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From the very constitution of our nature we cannot but feel, and resent injuries. Indeed, where there is no resentment, there cannot be forgiveness, which is a generous sacrifice of just indignation, to the good of our neighbour. The duty of forbearance and forgiveness is a portion of that lively and comprehensive charity which is described by the apostle, in the thirteenth chapter of his first Epistle to the Corinthians, "Which suffereth long and is kind, which seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." A regard to ourselves and those for whom we are concerned, may sometimes render unlimited forbearance, and a patient and submissive resignation of our rights to the insolence of the injurious oppressor, improper, and indeed impossible; but a forgiving disposition is always possible, always proper, always amiable.

If we are forced to yield to the dictates of resentment, we ought to yield with reluctance and regret: we should be ever open to, and desirous of, reconciliation, counting the person who offends us, not as an enemy, but admonishing him as a brother. We should not hastily take fire on every occasion of quarrel, but embrace the very first opportunity of reconciliation, in imitation of "the Lord who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy *."

We now proceed,

Secondly, to mention some of those motives by which a forbearing and forgiving disposition is recommended: and here it might be observed in general, that this amiable disposition, like all the graces and virtues, is pleasing to ourselves, and an object of complacency and delight to every beholder of the conduct to which it leads. It promotes the inward peace and comfort of the mind; it seems to favour

* Psal. ciii. 8.

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the vital functions and promote bodily health; it gains every heart, and procures well wishers and friends; for all men are eager to defend and support the man who appears reluctant to exercise rigour and severity in defending himself: whereas the malignant passions of envy, anger, malice, and revenge, distract and afflict the mind, disturb those operations on which life depends, and draw upon the person who indulges them, the aversion and hatred of the world. It is prudent, therefore, to put all those wrathful passions away from us, even in point of health, happiness, and acceptance and favour in the sight of mankind.

But as we cannot by any effort of the will, either dismiss revenge, or summon up the mild spirit of forgiveness; as we cannot by prudential or selfish considerations, excite in ourselves the emotions and feelings of charity, although by such considerations these feelings may be cherished and confirmed; it is proper, on our present sub-

ject, to urge such considerations as directly awaken and fan that generous flame which God has implanted in every breast, however it may be overborn and smothered by the selfish and angry passions. The offence that has been committed against you has either proceeded from ignorance and precipitation, or from the prevalence of some malignant habit and inclination. If your neighbour has abused your character, or spoken contumeliously of you, without cause, he has done so, not improbably, from a mistaken notion of your real disposition: he would love and esteem you more if he knew you better; for all men love the innocent and good, and consider them not only as well disposed to mankind in general, but even as their own particular friends. It is not you with whom he is in wrath, but another person whom he mistakes you to be; and would we not be more diverted than mortified if our friend should utter some hasty expressions of contempt and aversion, if he should meet us disguised in the garb

of an enemy ? But let us suppose that the offender has done you an injury, knowing your integrity and worth, and merely for the purpose of gratifying some inordinate desire, or in consequence of some inveterate evil habit. In this case we are to consider that no man does an injury to another, without doing a greater to himself ; or indulges the odious flames of malice or other vicious passions, without exposing himself to the danger of that worm which dies not, and that fire which is not quenched. Is there any punishment you would inflict on your adversary so severe as this ? and does not this reflection represent all injustice and vice as cruel diseases of the mind, and the unhappy person whom they lead captive, against the dictates of his conscience and reason, as an object not of revenge but of compassion ? nay, and not of compassion infected with contempt, but mingled with esteem ? for if the reason, the conscience, the inward man, amidst all the turbulency of passion, still stand firm and true to the

law of God, the man is not wholly unworthy of our respect. Though divided against himself, and complaining of a law "in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin," he is still an object both of sympathy and regard. The worst of men lose not all their virtue. Even the inhuman murderer, when he reflects on what he has done, becomes the object of his own hatred and abhorrence. He would fain fly from the face of every human creature, and hide his head in the darkness of some impenetrable wood, where he might never more behold his fellow-men, nor read in their countenances the condemnation of his crime. But solitude is still more insupportable to him than society: for who, by flying from his countrymen can fly from himself? or conceal himself from the severe regards of that viceroy of God, the man within? He therefore quits his retreat to throw himself on the mercy of men; if not in expectation of absolute impunity, yet to im-

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implore some little countenance and compassion, by owning the stings of compunction and remorse, by confessing his guilt, by acknowledging his crime. Did we thus, as humanity dictates, and as religion requires, trace the commission of injuries and crimes through rising passions and all their causes, through shame, remorse, and contrite repentance and confession, would we not say that the worst of men have some claim to our compassion, and would not our indignation at the effect be partly lost in contemplating the cause?

Thus doth reason justify, sympathy inspire, and every humane sentiment plead for mercy and lenient forgiveness. Forgiveness is the express command of God, whom we all offend daily, without a possibility of making the least requital, as we may to one another. Yet, notwithstanding the infinite distance between the creature and the Creator, which so much aggravates our crimes against the law of

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God,

God, he descends as it were from his prerogative, he places himself on a level with us, he offers forgiveness for forgiveness, divine pardon of sin for human remission of injuries.

“ Alas ! Alas !

Why, all the souls that were, were forfeit once;
And he that might the vantage best have took
Found out the remedy : how would you be,
If he, which is the top of judgment, should
But judge you as you are ? Oh, think on that,
And mercy then will breathe within your lips,
Like man new made.”

Such is the comment that was made on the divine mercy, by one who felt all the force of reason, and the power of nature *.”

But hearken to the voice of a divine teacher. “ Then came Peter to him and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him ? till seven times ? / Jesus saith unto him, I say

* Shakspeare's Measure for Measure,

not unto thee, until seven times : but, until seventy times seven. Therefore is the kingdom of Heaven likened unto a certain king which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him an hundred pence : and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And
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he would not : but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me : shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee ? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my Heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses *."

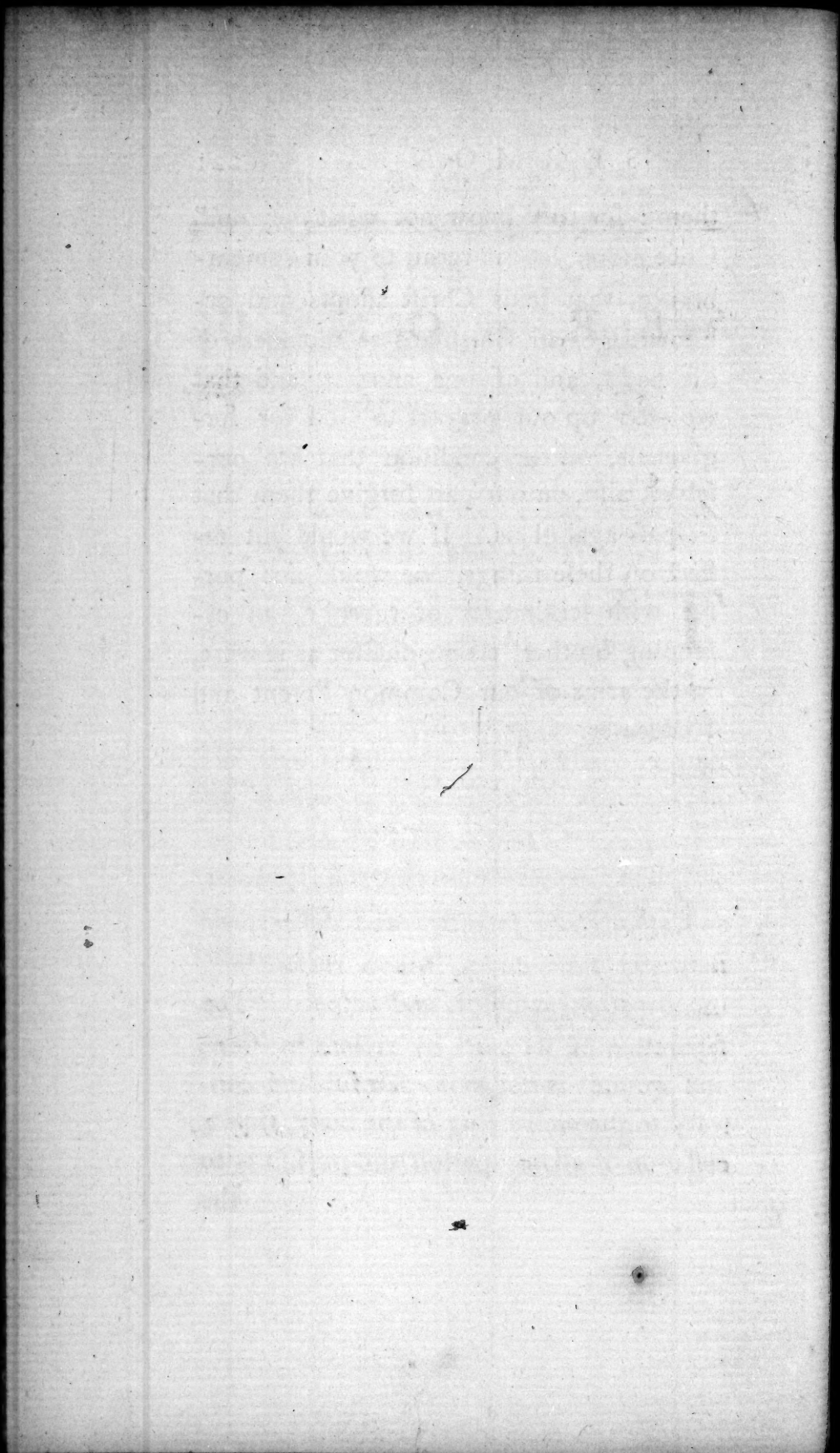
Let me now exhibit to your view, your Saviour praying on the cross for those that crucified him. " Father, forgive

* Matth. xviii. 21 — 35.

them :

them : for they know not what they do."

Once more, let me recall to your remembrance, that Jesus Christ adopts and acknowledges all Christians as members of his body, and of one another, and that we offer up our prayers to God for forgiveness, on the condition that we ourselves, also, on our part forgive them that trespass against us. If we would but reflect on these things, we would not pursue with sentiments of revenge, an offending brother, taking shelter as it were, in the arms of our Common Parent and Redeemer.



S E R M O N XIII.

On the Sin of Intemperance.

EPH. v. 18.

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the spirit.

THE human mind is endowed with various powers, propensities, and passions, and in the exercise and gratification of these, its happiness, and indeed its very nature, consists. The spiritual energy, the never-ceasing activity and ardour of the mind seeks for fuel to feed its vital flame, and, without some object to occupy, interest, and agitate our faculties and desires, we naturally sink down into a melancholy inoccupation, langour, and despair. The separation of its parts by violent incisions and wounds is not more painful and contrary to the well-being of the body, than a cessation of all occupation and pursuit is to
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the soul : for solidity and continuity of parts is not more necessary to the corporeal frame than thought, motion, and exertion is to the constitution and happiness of the mind. Accordingly, that insupportable listlessness and calm which follows the deprivation of every subject of attention, and every object of hope, is justly accounted amongst the greatest calamities of human life. Nay, it is perhaps the very last stage of human wretchedness, since it terminates often in the loss of reason, a weariness of life, madness, and self-murder. In bodily pain, and in mental anguish, there is an excitement of the blood and spirits which enables men to bear up under various sufferings, or alleviates them by tears, and other natural expressions of passion. But when the mind is arrested in its active career by the chilling hand, of a listless languor and unconcern, not only are the walls broken down, but the citadel itself is subdued, and the city given up to captivity, or to the devouring sword. The spirit of a man, says Solomon, will sustain his infirmity,

mity, but a wounded spirit who can bear." When the mind is reduced to a state of langour and inoccupation, whether by losses and disappointments, or by bodily indisposition, recourse is too often had to the stimulating power of intoxicating drugs and liquors, which, by exciting a ferment in the animal spirits and nerves, restore a temporary glow of sentiment and passion, and thereby afford a temporary relief to that weight of affliction which accompanies a stagnation of thought : so that even in this disease of the mind, which hurries it on to the refuge of a delirium, we may perceive its native energy and dignity, and that it is formed for activity, exercise, and constant thought or contemplation. The more we study the word as well as the works of God, the more we shall be impressed with a sense of the Divine wisdom displayed in each of them. In the sacred scriptures we discover a knowledge of the nature of man, which is too profound for any of the human race, and which can be-

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long only to him who is the author of it. The precepts of the gospel, like its doctrines, are perfectly suitable to our fallen state : here we find what our great philosopher and countryman, the restorer of sound sense and experiment in the pursuit of science*, justly desiderated in our books of moral philosophy ; the means of obeying the precepts of reason, the way in which we shall be able to attain to the ends which we have in view in our progress from a state of corruption and misery to a state of holiness and happiness. Philosophy with perfect propriety and truth exposes the folly and the criminality of intemperance, the ruin of habitual intoxication, and the sinfulness and misery of excess of every kind. But what avails all the force of cold and comfortless advice ? What avail prescriptions, if we cannot command the prescribed remedies ? To a mind broken by misfortune, and enervated by habitual drunkenness, that miserable resource of the

* Lord Bacon.

unfortunate, whether unfortunate from the habit of intoxication, however produced, or from other causes, all dehortations, even the most reasonable and eloquent, are wholly vain. It is impossible, by any effort of the will, to conquer the power of habit, and to fill up that void, that insupportable void, which must be the immediate consequence of foregoing those habitual indulgencies in which their unhappy victim delights. But the wisdom of God both dissuades from intoxication, and teaches how habits of intemperance may be subdued. "And be not drunk with wine wherein is excess; but be filled with the spirit." Human nature cannot, indeed, support the langour of inoccupation, and is, therefore, prone to seek relief from those dangerous and debasing stimulants which, without any exertion on the part of the unfortunate person who has recourse to their aid, afford a momentary relief; but seek and pursue the graces and gifts of the spirit, fix your attention on the heavenly objects of faith, on objects unseen and eter-

nal : these by their grandeur and importance, will transport, and agitate, and fill, and expand all your soul : so shall you be emancipated from the power and the misery of feverish excess, a divine enthusiasm will occupy and interest your mental powers, and your nature will be transformed into the image of that pure and perfect Being whose attributes you adore, and whose countenance and favour you stedfastly seek and implore. The words of our text include,

First, a precept, “ And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess.” And

Secondly, the means whereby we shall be enabled to comply with it : “ But be filled with the spirit.”

It is my present design to discourse on each of these points. Among the bad effects of drunkenness, from which we are, on the ground of reason, to estimate its guilt, we may rank, in the first place, the loss of time which it occasions. It was this consideration, it would

seem, that led the Apostle to the dehoration in our text. "Awake, says he, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. And be not drunk with wine wherein is excess; but be filled with the spirit." And what is still worse than waste of time, drunkenness disqualifies men for the duties of their station, not only by a temporary disorder of their faculties, but, at length, by a constant incapacity and stupefaction, bordering on a privation of reason. It precipitates most constitutions into excesses of anger and of lewdness: it is pernicious to health, to fortune, to reputation: it involves the family and other connections of the intemperate person in uneasiness, difficulties, and constant alarms: it marrs the enjoyment, and shortens the period of life. The delirium of intoxication is transient in its duration, and calamitous in its consequences: it is feverish,

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illusive,

illusive, and vain as a dream ; but in its effects, it partakes of the nature of real and fixed evil. “ Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging : and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise *.” “ Be not amongst wine-bibers, amongst riotous eaters of flesh ; for the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty ; and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags †.” “ Who hath woe ? who hath sorrow ? who hath contentions ? who hath babbling ? who hath wounds without cause ? who hath redness of eyes ? they that tarry long at the wine, they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon

* Prov. xx. 1,

† Prov. xxiii. 20, 21.

the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick: they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? and I will seek it yet again*." In this passage of scripture the consequences of inebriation are painted in lively and just colours: and yet, after experiencing all its bitter fruits, the unhappy victim to its fascinating power, says to himself "When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again." O miserable man! who shall deliver thee from the body of this death? to be thus dragged in chains by an odious and furious monster into a den of lions, and of darkness, and death, without the power of stopping the fatal career, this is wretchedness indeed! against this precipitate and downward course it behoves the unhappy man to bend all his efforts, and to implore relief and succour from every quarter. His case is terrible indeed: for the enemy he has to encounter is himself, and to rule,

* Prov. xxiii. 29—35.

check, thwart, and controul his own spirit, is a more arduous task than to storm the proudest citadel fortified by the hand of nature, and also by that of art. Yet as no citadel is absolutely impregnable, as every strong hold may be reduced by vigorous assault or patient blockade, so even the power of evil habits may be overborne, and subdued by the persevering efforts of human resolution, founded on reason, and built up and fortified by the various motives and views exhibited in the Gospel. This the exhortation to abstain from all excess implies, and this the nature of man justifies. For the mind undoubtedly possesses a power of converting its edge inward upon itself, and making all that passes there an object of reflection; and from step to step it may gradually recede from evil courses, thus turning the power of habit against itself. With regard to the deplorable case in question, a habit of intoxication : let the patient, for that is the style in which we ought to
speak

Speak of the votary of wine, let the patient deeply revolve in his mind, the dreadfulneſs of his malady, and how many ſtrong men have thereby been ſlain; let him think on the truth of what is obſerved by the wiſeſt of men, a truth confirmed by his own experience, that multiplied experience has not been able to wean him from an appetite for a deadly poiſon, and recollect how all his paſt reſolutions of amendment have proved like the morning cloud and early dew, which quickly vaniſh away. A tender anguiſh, a ſelf-commiſeration, will naturally ſpring up in the mind broken down and meliorated by theſe and other ſimilar reflections. This anguiſh, this ſelf-commiſeration, and ſelf-diffidence, is the very temper of mind in which he may renew his reſolutions with a ſure proſpect of ſucceſs. Impreſſed with a ſenſe of the difficulties he has to encounter, but at the ſame time with the certain ruin that muſt overtake him

him if he does not surmount them, he will persevere in his course with fear and trembling, with a vigilance over his own heart, and looking around him for whatever he can call to his aid.

In the first place, when he has, in such a frame of mind, formed such general resolutions of quitting the thorny and fiery paths of inebriation, for the pleasant and tranquil ways of sobriety, it will be prudent, and indeed necessary, to prescribe to himself certain rules as to time, and quantity of refreshment. Let these rules be peremptory and inflexible: let them be rigidly observed: let the invariable observance of them be made the standard by which the penitent reformer of himself, judges of the sincerity of his own resolutions, and by which he values himself, approves himself to himself, and estimates his own character. The moment he perceives in himself the very infancy of a tendency towards an inclination to intemperance, he should collect his resolution
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to this point; and consider this as the crisis of his happiness, of his respect for himself, and of his very existence as a rational being. Vague and indefinite resolutions of abstemiousness are apt to give way to extraordinary occasions, and extraordinary occasions to occur perpetually. Whereas the stricter the rule, the more rigidly we abide by it; and there are many persons who would rather sacrifice their appetites than break their rule, who would not be easily induced to exercise mortification from higher motives.

Secondly, in forming resolutions of abstinence, it is prudent to examine one's self, and to weigh well what he is able to bear or to forbear, to do or to suffer. All retrenchments of wonted indulgences should, though constant and unremitted, yet be gentle and gradual. This, indeed, is necessary to health; but the point, at present contended for, is, that it is also necessary in order to carry good designs into practice. Violent resolutions are neither
easily

easily nor often executed ; whereas such as are moderate are fulfilled with certainty, and without much pain.

Thirdly, it will be found a mighty encouragement to persevere in the course of reformation, that it will, in the very outset, be found to be practicable. If you abstain from excess, if you make one step in the salutary work of retrenchment for one day, why not do the same for another, and another ? nay, and that with greater advantage ? for the power of evil habit grows weaker and weaker by resistance, and each succeeding is performed with greater ease than the preceding step. It will conduce exceedingly to success in reformation, to have stated times of self-examination, as in the evening of every day before retiring to rest. If you have acted up with constancy to the rules you have prescribed, you will lie down with inward peace and self-approbation ; your sleep will be sweet, and you will find rest unto your soul. It is true that many

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sins of omission and commission will be presented, on a retrospective view to every sinner ; but invincible resolution to oppose the sin that doth most easily beset us, is a matter of self-congratulation ; and it is indeed worthy of praise, since it is attended with difficulty and pain, though these by perseverance, are greatly diminished. This predominant passion, whatever it be, whether the vice that forms the subject of the present discourse, or any other, we ought constantly to set before our eyes. A great prince *, on the approach of death, sent for his successor, and in the presence of some of his chief officers, thus addressed him “ I have acquired and preserved what will be thought a great dominion by the sword, but I have never suffered mine enemy to be out of sight. A great general once asked me, why I placed the portrait of my opposer in all my apartments? I told him

* The late king of Prussia.

what

what I now tell you, that it was to keep me upon my guard; and I hope, that if the patrimony which you will soon inherit is dear to you, you will find it, for your future conduct, no unnecessary precept." The portrait of our predominant passion, our greatest enemy, kept constantly before our eyes, will keep us on our guard against its attacks.

Fourthly, as an appetite for intoxicating liquors and drugs is not natural, but acquired by imitation and by habit, it is above all things necessary, in a struggle to overcome a habit of drinking to excess, to change if possible, one's place of abode and companions, and the whole of his situation. A man, sunk deep in a habit of intoxication, will, upon such a change, when he finds himself loosened from the associations which held him fast, sometimes make a successful effort, and extricate himself out of it. In a matter of
such

such extreme moment, it is surely well worth while to make the experiment.

These are among the natural means of extricating men from habits of inebriety or other evil habits, and they are pointed out both by reason and in the word of God. But the means of breaking off a habit of intoxication, which are the most powerful of all, and infallible, are those contained in the text, "but be filled with the spirit."

And this is the second thing, in our method, which was to be considered.

Those who refuse themselves their usual gratifications, feel an uneasiness, a void, which is unsupportable if not filled up by other pursuits and gratifications; and indeed, since, as has been already observed, it is impossible to endure the mortal languor of total inoccupation, this void must be filled up by fixing the ardour and energy of the mind on new objects. "Walk in the spirit, says the apostle,

tle, in his Epistle to the Galatians, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." The fruits of the spirit, "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance;" these affections sufficiently occupy, interest, and, if we may use a familiar phrase, though it be sometimes applied to frivolous subjects, these affections sufficiently entertain the mind, and thus, while the old man decays, the inward man is renewed more and more, in holiness and righteousness, after the image of him by whom it is created. Being risen with Christ, the Christian convert naturally seeks those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. He sets his affections on things above, not on things on the earth; for he is dead, and his life is hid with Christ in God, in the blessed and certain hope that when Christ, who is his life, shall appear, he shall also appear with him in glory. Thus divine wisdom not only reprehends vice, which leads to misery, but points out the means
by

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by which we may be extricated from its fascinating and fatal power. With regard to the dreadful malady of habitual intoxication, the sublime doctrines and hopes of the Gospel afford the noblest, and surest, and an infallible remedy: "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the spirit."

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S E R M O N XIV.

On the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

LUKE XV. 11—32.

*And he said, a certain man had two sons :
and the younger of them said to his fa-
ther, Father, give me the portion of goods
that falleth to me, and he divided unto
them his living. And not many days
after, the younger son gathered all toge-
ther, and took his journey into a far coun-
try, and there wasted his substance with
riotous living. And when he had spent
all, there arose a mighty famine in that
land: and he began to be in want. And
he went and joined himself to a citi-
zen of that country; and he sent him into
his fields to feed swine. And he would
fain have filled his belly with the husks that
the swine did eat: and no man gave unto
him. And when he came to himself, he
said, how many hired servants of my fa-
ther's*

ther's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger ! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son : make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him, and the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, bring forth the best robe, and put it on him ; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet ; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it ; and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost and is found, and they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field : and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant ? and he said unto him,

him, Thy brother is come: and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost and is found.

THE celebrated parable of the prodigal son, represents in more affecting colours than are within the compass of human eloquence, the folly of vice, and the wisdom of repentance and

reformation. The natural aptitude of man to depart from God, the miseries which he draws on himself by this ungrateful and foolish conduct, and the divine mercy in receiving with out-stretched arms, every penitent sinner.

In order to illustrate that truth so important, and so full of comfort to the miserable sons of men, that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God, over every sinner that repenteth," Jesus said, "A certain man had two sons, and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. Some interpreters, by the elder son, in this parable, understand the Jewish nation; and, as the parables, as well as many of the prophecies in the Sacred Scriptures have a two-fold aspect, it is indeed possible that in the parable of the prodigal son, our Saviour might have had an eye to the prejudices of the Pharisees and Scribes, and others of the Jewish nation who

who were present when he delivered it. But certainly, in its general and grand view or intention, it comprehends all nations and men, and is as wide as the universal scheme or plan of providence and grace. It is intended to illustrate the misery of immorality and irreligion, and the wisdom and happiness of returning to a course of piety and virtue. The younger son of this good father, and good man, in the parable, is wearied of the sobriety, the decency, the regularity of his father's house, and unaffected with those multiplied instances of paternal affection towards him, which ought to have inspired a return of filial reverence and love, and an inclination to continue in the family, and enjoy the countenance, conversation, and advice of so amiable and beneficent a parent. But he is unwilling, and his passions so high that he is incapable of submitting to the restraint of this good man's family. He therefore demands his portion of the estate. His father complies with his request, and now being provided

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with the means of dissipation, he tarries not long at home, but gathers all together that belongs to him, and takes his journey into a far country, and there wastes his substance with riotous living. He gathers all together, he leaves nothing at home, because, it would seem, he means never more to return: he has determined to extricate himself, to forget his father, and his father's friends, to form new connections that shall effectually banish early endearments, however natural and tender, from his mind. Thus he reconciles himself to the idea, he is even happy in the prospect of being dead and lost to his father, and of forgetting not only the relation in which he stood to him, but even his very existence. Widely different, we may suppose, were the sentiments which, on the departure of the son *, filled the breast of his indulgent

* When we reflect on the circumstance, that our Saviour was wont to take advantage of present objects, and recent events and occurrences, in order to impress his discourses

gent father. He now, no doubt, revolved in his mind the innocence, the dawn of reason, and the affectionate fondness, and helplessness and confident reliance of his infant and early years; he felt, we must suppose, the liveliest disappointment, the tenderest anguish, when his son, whom he had expected to be the glory and comfort of his age, had no sooner been master of himself and of his own actions, than he had hastened away from his presence, not on any honourable or even innocent pretence, but to take his fill of pleasure, to waste his substance in riotous living. The recollection of his son is embittered by the reflection, that his son thinks not on him, that he lives not at all in his heart, which is wholly engrossed with the strange woman, and other instruments and means of vicious satisfaction.

courses on the minds of his hearers, we shall find some reason to believe that the story of the prodigal son is not fictitious, but real.

But,

But, while we thus naturally indulge a sympathy with the parent of this young man, and a just indignation against the prodigal son himself, let us recollect that this story faithfully represents the situation in which we all stand with relation to almighty God, our common parent. He has placed us all as children in his family, he has provided for all our natural wants, he has made us capable of knowing and conversing with him, and of that supreme happiness which a knowledge of God and heavenly conversation bestow. He has prescribed rules for our conduct in our different stations; and, that we might be capable of moral excellence, and resembling, in some measure, the divine perfections, he has endowed us with freedom of will, whereby it is in our power to choose what is right in preference to what is wrong; to pay a rational and noble homage to virtue or righteousness, and to love and obey the author of our being with the affection and freedom

dom of men, not under the constraint of slaves.—Thus we all of us receive from our heavenly Father a portion : and, having received it, we are impatient to leave his house, we abuse his bounty, trample on his laws, he is not in all our thoughts, and we emphatically declare by the whole of our conduct, that we are unwilling to have this man to reign over us.

While the fullness and wantonness of men make them depart from God and from religion, the misery in which they involve themselves by their misconduct have a natural tendency to constrain them to return. This truth is set forth in a very natural and interesting light, by the sufferings of the prodigal son, after he had wasted in a strange country, his substance with riotous living. For, as we read “ When he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country,

and he sent him into the fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, how many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger?" Separated from riotous companions, and consigned to silence, solitude, and extreme want, he comes to himself, to his sober senses: for before, he was mad, as mad as high health and spirits, and affluence with unbounded liberty could make him. Such is the effect of silence, solitude, and fasting! The Assyrian monarch, the proud Nebuchadnezzar, walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon and said, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? while the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from Heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken, the kingdom is departed from thee: and they shall

shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grafs as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar; and he was driven from men, and did eat grafs as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of Heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles feathers, and his nails like birds claws. And at the end of the days, I Nebuchadnezzar lift up mine eyes unto Heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation *."

Thus the prodigal son in the parable, lifts up his eyes to his father's house,

* Daniel iv. 29—34.

compares his past with his present situation, and resolves to return, poor, and humbled to the very dust, to his father. "I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." Though the journey was long and tedious, and that he was unprovided of all things necessary for performing it, and must depend on accident or charitable contributions for his subsistence by the way, yet he prudently resolved to arise and pursue it. He roused himself equally from sloth and despair, he entered on his journey with that resolution which accompanies a pressure of affliction, and an anxious desire of relief. He came at last to his father. But a sense of his past misbehaviour, and his present miserable appearance made him hesitate and linger, and shame and fear of a repulse, or of an harsh reception, though they did not shake or overturn, somewhat damped and clouded

clouded his resolution. This young man's character is marked with the remains, or rather the return of a native candour, modesty and ingenuity. He neither conceals nor extenuates his guilt, he is ashamed of his conduct, he confesses his transgression. The violence of passion, and of youthful lusts which war against the spirit, precipitated him into a course of pleasure and dissipation, which turned his heart from his father's family; but he shelters not his crime and his folly, like the hypocrite, the backbiter, or the malicious and invidious slanderer, under fair prettexts. No! he acknowledges his transgressions, and his sin is ever before him. "Innumerable evils have compassed me about, mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up*." This is the language of sincere contrition, of an honest heart, this is a sacrifice well

* Psalm xl. 12.

pleasing to God. A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise *.” It is not the deepness of the guilt, the magnitude, or glare of any crime however great, that excludes from the favour of God, but that disingenuous self-righteousness, hypocrisy, and double-mindedness, which endeavours to palliate and extenuate crimes, and stands hard-hearted, impudent, and unabashed, even in the presence of the Searcher of hearts. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

While the penitent prodigal was yet afar off, his father, who happened to walk abroad, musing perhaps on the fate of his fugitive son, at that instant saw him, and recognised him, though squalid and covered with dust and rags; “had compassion, and ran, though old and infirm, and fell on his neck and kissed him.

* Psalm li. 17.

And the son said unto him, Father I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." He would have gone on, according to his purpose, to have solicited the office of a menial servant, but his father, whose overflowing heart at first could not find utterance, now interrupted his premeditated address, and said to his servants: "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet." These, according to the custom of eastern countries, were marks of favour and respect.—"And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found; and they began to be merry." Here we have an amiable, and very encouraging picture of the divine compassion of the father of mercies. The circumstance of the Father meeting and embracing his returning son while he was yet afar off, shews how

ready

ready our heavenly Father is to invite, to meet half way, if we may say so, and generously to prevent with his loving kindness, the very confessions of the humble and penitent. Nothing can possibly exceed the expressiveness of this conclusion of the whole parable, and lengthened comments might diminish, but could not add to its general effect,

As to what follows concerning the disapprobation and anger of the elder son, it is an episode, intended as a reprehension and remonstrance to those who limit the benevolence of God by their own selfish prejudices, who impiously lay claim to a kind of exclusive favour in the sight of God, who arrogate a sort of merit to themselves on account of their imperfect services, and envy those communications of grace and happiness which the common parent indulges to all men. It comprehends, no doubt, the Jewish nation;

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nation; but it seems also to comprehend all those who entertain narrow and false notions concerning the dispensations and dealings of God towards nations and individuals who differ from themselves in certain tenets and religious ceremonies.

S E R M O N XV.

On the Immortality of the Soul.

I COR. XV. 53.

*For this corruptible must put on incorruption,
and this mortal must put on immortality.*

IT is evident, at first glance, that there is a wide interval in the scale of nature, between mankind and the brute creation. The vast capacity of the human soul, which comprehends such a variety and extent of past, present, and future objects, while it is itself incomprehensible; which contains a self-originating principle of motion and determination; and which, unsatisfied with discoveries multiplied on discoveries without end, still darts forward into the interminable regions of space and time, and wanders with unwearied wing through eternity: The vast, growing, and unlimited power

of this spiritual or thinking substance, has led the most refined, as well as the rudest of all nations, in all ages of the world, to entertain the belief that it will not perish with the body, but, surviving this mortal wreck, will still retain that consciousness of identity which has been preserved amidst all those vicissitudes, and that total alteration, which, in the course of even a few years, happen to the body. For it seems absurd to suppose that a substance which grasps, involves, and intertwines all material objects, which places them at a distance from itself, and makes them objects of reflection ; it seems impossible that such a substance can be itself of the same nature with that which it thinks upon, and which it recognizes to be different from itself, with the same certainty with which it recognizes its own existence. The reader is not more certainly different from the book that he reads, than the mind, which is the man, is different from the body : for the mind starts
back

back from whatever part of the body is fixed on by materialists as its substance or seat, and mocks their researches, and eludes their grasp. The brain, the cerebellum, the pineal gland, the animal spirits, the nerves as acting and acted upon by external objects; all these the mind considers as distinct from, and as belonging to itself, nor can it be persuaded that its existence will cease with that of so temporary and so frail a habitation. Here we might adopt the language of the Roman law "No one from being a person, can become a thing, or subject of property."

They who maintained, on principles of natural philosophy, the physical immortality, or in other words, the immateriality of the soul, without taking into their accounts those moral phenomena which point to a future state of rewards and punishments, were of opinion that the soul was derived from, and, on the dissolution of the body, mounted up above the natural elements of earth, water,

air, and fire, to each of which they assigned a particular region, to the supreme empyreal or etherial regions, the native abodes of spiritual beings, to whom they gave the various names of æons, dæmons, and gods. It is under a similar view of the nature of the soul, that the wise man says "the spirit of man goeth upward, and the spirit of a beast goeth downward to the earth †."

Men of abstracted or metaphysical turns have observed, that there is a perpetual change and revolution going on throughout all the works of nature, and that every thing generates, or at least terminates in its contrary. Thus day follows night, and watchfulness follows sleep, pleasure follows pain, good follows evil, and so on. The very nature or essence of things, it has been observed, depends on their contraries. Virtue or justice would not be known, would not in reality exist, but

† Eccles. iii. 21.

for injustice and vice. Heat depends on cold, and cold on heat. The idea of crookedness could have no place, were there no such opposition to it as that of straightness, nor could we conceive any thing to be straight, if we did not know that there are some things which are crooked. As sleep leads to watchfulness, as night to day, as the putrefaction of vegetables to their re-production, so even the light of reason has led men to conclude, not indeed with absolute certainty, but with that faint assent which distant analogies produce, that death leads to life. In the same train of thinking the apostle Paul, who was educated in all the philosophy of the times in which he lived, reasons in favour of the immortality of the soul, in the context "some will say, how are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die. And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain. But
God

God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.” It has been objected to this analogical reasoning of the apostle, that the seed that is cast into the ground does not die, but is developed and expanded into newness of life. Now the ideas contained in this objection, as is always the case, will, on examination, be found to strengthen instead of weakening an argument founded on truth; for as it is only the outward integuments of the seed that die, while the embryo plant is gradually swelled and developed, so it is only the material part of our frame that is dissolved by death. Our spiritual, active, and energetic part remains, and in a future state of existence animates a new body, even as the vivifying power of the germ puts forth fibres, and roots, and at last leaves, by which it converts into its own nature, the influences of the earth and the heavens. What these influences are to the vegetable, in that state of dissolution and torpor which precedes its re-production, the se-

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cret influences of the spirit of God in whom we live, move, and have our being, are to the human soul in every state and stage of its existence. For our bodies do not more necessarily depend upon corporeal nourishment, than the powers and faculties of the soul do upon the communications of that divine light which "enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world†." At death the body returns to its kindred dust, and the soul to God who gave it: it returns to that source of light of which it is an emanation, to that ocean from which it sprang.

What penance and punishments await the departed spirits of wicked and impenitent men in a future state, we do not know, or with what material forms they may be combined. "All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds; there are

† John i. 9.

also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead †." As there are beings and spheres of various orders, and as there are beings that pass from one state to another, so also is the resurrection of the dead: and while the souls of corrupt and abandoned men may be united with low and horrid forms and elements, the spirits of just men made perfect, will be clothed with celestial bodies, and be as the angels of God in heaven ‡." "They who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage. Neither can they die any more, for they are equal unto the angels,

† 1 Cor. xv. 39—42.

‡ Matth. xxii. 30.

and

and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection *."

There is a very interesting question agitated among theologians, whether, at death, the soul passes into a state of entire insensibility, and remains therein until the resurrection of the body; or, on the contrary, retains consciousness, memory, the power of comparing ideas, or judgment, and all or any of its faculties. As the very nature or essence of the soul consists in thinking, it would seem probable that the operations of the mind are not interrupted by death, but continued without intermission, and that with a greater degree of intenseness than in its state of union with the body; and if so, the joyful anticipations of the righteous, of the bliss that awaits them in their nearer approaches to God, after the day of judgment, will be more lively, and the apprehensions of the wicked more severe and

* Luke xx. 35, 36.

excruciating, than when they lived in this world.

Men of great eminence in all manner of science and literature have shewn, with great plausibility, that the soul is immaterial, from the phenomenon of dreaming. From anatomical observations compared with the nature of the mind : from the mechanical construction of those bodily organs which are connected with spiritual operations, and the manner in which they are affected and applied, in all the variety of mental exertion, compared with their state and situation in sleep, they conclude that the soul could not possess the wonderful power of dreaming, if its essence were material, and dependent wholly on bodily organization. In dreaming, the mind exercises not only the powers of imagination, but also the faculty of reasoning. Mathematicians have resolved difficult problems, and invented the most ingenious demonstrations, in dreaming, on subjects which puzzled
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and confounded them when awake. And, men know, from personal experience, that in dreaming, the mind is often conscious that it is in a dream, regrets that this is the case, and wishes to protract the agreeable illusion. In the mean time all the powers and functions of the body are at profound rest, and as it were, dead, those alone excepted which are termed the vital functions, on which depends its preservation. Dreams, by almost all the nations of antiquity with which we are at all acquainted, were held to be divine; for the spiritual nature of the soul was in these apparent to every capacity, and in these communications were supposed to subsist between the powers above and mortal men. That the spirit of God influences and informs the minds of men, on some extraordinary occasions, in dreams, is evident from the Holy Scriptures both of the Old and New Testament.

But whether the wonderful phenomenon of dreaming amounts to a demonstration,

stration, or proof of the immateriality of the soul, is a matter which I shall not take upon me to determine. This at least may be safely affirmed, that we may from thence conceive the possibility of the soul's existence, and exercising its faculties in a state of separation from the body. And it seems highly probable that, at death, the soul does not sink down into a total lethargy, but is on the contrary, even more sensible, alive, and active than in its present state.

What we have hitherto insisted on, may be called the natural proofs of the immortality of the soul. There are other proofs of the same important truth, which are properly denominated moral: and these, although they do not involve in their nature such an air of demonstration, are however more convincing. When we reflect on the justice of God, on that abhorrence of iniquity which fills even the human breast, and which, much more, must be inherent in the divine nature, on the

the one hand : and when we turn our eyes to the triumphs of vice, and the sufferings of innocence and injured merit on the other, we cannot believe that the present state is that in which a final account is taken of man ; but, that man is an accountable creature we all feel, and experimentally know. The fervor of youth, the extravagancies of dissipation, the pursuits of avarice, of ambition, and of love, the din and bustle of the world, the flights of fancy, the chilling and soporific draughts of scepticism, which for a time level all distinctions, and confound the reasoning faculty with the delirium of fancy ; no ! nor the balmy power of sleep itself, can compose the troubled conscience of the murderer, or other atrocious offender against the laws of God. Even in his slumbers he is terrified with visions, and an avenging spirit is ever present to his disturbed soul. In vain do sophists attempt to destroy the power by analysing the nature of conscience. The deadly

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arrow sticks fast in the side of the stricken deer, nor can he find any quiet in rest, or in flight, in hill or dale, or open plain, or thickest shade. Since, then, we cannot rid ourselves of the stings of conscience when we have done amiss, any more than of ourselves, an invincible sense of right and wrong, of merit and demerit, is consonant to truth and nature: and, since there is not, by any means, an equal distribution of good and evil in this, we must, and cannot but believe that such an equal distribution will infallibly take place in another world. In this all nations are unanimous: all devote the triumphant oppressor, the dark but fortunate villain who escapes punishment in this, to the hand of just vengeance in another state of existence. All recommend the cause of the oppressed widow and fatherless children, to the care of the all-seeing God, and find a sensible consolation in the reflection, that however the wicked may escape punishment in this world, they

shall not escape the righteous judgment of God. On this subject, we appeal to common life, to every one's feelings. Even a just man would order matters, on the whole, with greater justice and regard to merit, than we see displayed on many occasions in the conduct of human affairs. Therefore, we cannot suppose that the present is the only scene in the drama of existence, in which human actions will appear, or in which they will be either rewarded or punished. Another scene or scenes will appear, and at the concluding act, every knee will bow before the righteous judge of the world, and every tongue confess. The plan of providence, of which we see only a small part, is imperfectly comprehended. This we know, that an infinite, self-existent, and all-perfect Being, the author of whatever excellence appears in the natural and moral world, must be the friend, the patron, and the rewarder of truth and virtue. These are indeed, in the general

course of things, more conducive to happiness, by many degrees, than an opposite conduct; but still the instances in which injustice triumphs over justice, inhumanity and oppression over humanity and mercy, are so numerous and so striking, that the supposition of a future state alone can justify the ways of God to man.

Thus far the reason and the wishes of man: he indulges the hope of immortality, and listens with pleasure to every argument that tends to support so pleasing an anticipation. But if natural religion has her hopes, she has also her fears: she sees all the sons of men go down into the dust a prey to corruption; and sense and imagination are at perpetual variance with the conclusions of reason. The Gospel of Jesus Christ clears up all her doubts; and illustrates and confirms by new arguments, proofs, and discoveries, the doctrine of the soul's immortality.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a pledge and security, that Christians, members of his body, shall also be raised with him. "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him: for the Lord himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive, and remain, shall be caught up together with them into the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord*." "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump (for the trumpet shall sound) the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible (in the words of our text) must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

* 1 Thessal. iv. 14—17.

It is impossible that the fervid and zealous spirit of the apostle Paul could dismiss so glorious a subject, so sublime a conclusion, without some reflections and expressions of rapture. "So, says he, when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory. O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory? the sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that our labour is not in vain, in the Lord."

S E R M O N XVI.

On the Immortality of the Soul.

I COR. X. 53.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

THE first Christians, to whom the epistles of the apostles were immediately addressed, were subjected, on account of their religious profession, to all the terrors of religious persecution: to hatred, contempt, scorn, and insolence, and every evil office from their neighbours; and from the civil government, imprisonment, confiscation of goods, cruel mockings, or stripes attended with insulting expressions, to famine, torments and death. Thus their life was a state of warfare, a warfare in which patience and resigna-

tion to the divine will, were the only weapons they opposed to the hostilities of their oppressors. In this calamitous situation the hope of a future life sustained them under the weight of afflictions, which, in comparison of eternity, lasted but a moment, and with that weight of glory which was reserved for the faithful, which seemed not only tolerable, but even light and easy. "We are bound," says our apostle, in his second Epistle to the Thessalonians, to thank God always for you, brethren, as it was meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all towards each other endureth: so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God, for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure; which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: seeing it is a righteous thing with God

God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you ; and to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ : who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power ; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasures of his goodness, and the work of faith with power ; that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,

that

that ye be not soon shaken in mind; stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word or our epistle."

In like manner the apostle reasons with the Hebrews, and excites them to persevere in virtue, by holding up for their contemplation, the conduct of many of their ancestors, who, with equal wisdom and glory, chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. "Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea moreover of bonds

bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheep-skins, and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy; they wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against

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gainst himself, lest ye be wearied, and faint in your minds; ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth *." The reasoning here is plain, strong, and affecting; the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and others too, from the dead, is a clear and convincing proof that those who die in Christ shall also live with him. The almighty power of God is able to burst through the fetters of the grave, and, obtaining the victory over death, to bestow immortal life and happiness on all who believe and obey the Gospel. "Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of

* Heb. xii. 5, 6.

the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

In these words of the divinely inspired apostle there is a precept contained, and also a motive to comply with it.

The precept is "Be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." This precept, as has already been observed, refers to the difficulties and dangers which attended the Christian profession in the first age of the church. But, nevertheless, it is so far from being useless or unapplicable to the present state of the church, that it is at least fully as seasonable, and as necessary now, as ever it was in any former period. The Christian course is in all times and seasons justly compared to a warfare. As in war, it is not the destroying sword alone of the enemy that wastes and destroys armies, but much more the want of discipline and order, luxurious climates, and effeminacy and corruption of manners;

ners ; so, in the Christian warfare, it is not when the alarms of bloody persecutions are sounded in his ears by his fellow-soldiers, that the follower of the Captain of our salvation is in the greatest danger of relaxing his nerves, and slackening his pace. No, it is the secret, the insinuating approaches of vice disguised in the robe of harmless pleasure, that are most to be dreaded ; nor does the grand adversary of mankind appear more formidable to the eye of sober reason and reflection, when, as a roaring lion he walketh about seeking whom he may devour, than when he lurks like a serpent in some deceitful paradise. To watch every motion of our soul, to restrain the tumults of anger, and resist every inclination to forbidden pleasure, to perform, on every occasion, our duty to God, to man, and to ourselves, to add to " faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly

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ly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity *," this is no easy task; it is a labour from which all that is earthly and sensual in our nature lies constantly in wait to seduce, and from which, what are emphatically styled, by the inspired writers, the lusts of the spirit, often attempt to tear us, as it were, by violence. It is highly necessary, therefore, that we should be sober and vigilant, steadfast and unmoveable, even if we would not return to those shameful and wretched courses which we had resolved to abandon; but much more as the Christian life neither is, nor indeed can be stationary, but is a continued and unremitted progress towards what we may call spiritual and moral perfection, that is, the confirmation of faith, the extension of knowledge, and the acquisition of every grace and virtue. The apostle, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, shews that the Christian course is

* 2 Peter i. 5—7.

not merely a departure from evil, nor yet merely a resolute determination to practise virtuous actions. To cut off evil lusts and passions by the repeated incisions of self-denial and mortification, to perform good works from the hope of reward or the fear of punishment; all this, although it is not without praise, because it cannot be done without pain, is not the perfection of a Christian, whose soul by the influence of the evangelical dispensation, is exalted to such a love of mental purity, as to abhor vice and to desire virtue for its own sake. There are different doctrines, motives, and views exhibited in the sacred Scriptures, which are properly called the wisdom of God, suitable to the different stages of the Christian pilgrim's progress. It is therefore that we are thus exhorted, "Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith to-
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wards God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment." These doctrines will continue to produce their fruits, and other fruits too, will spring up; peace of mind, and joy in the present power and testimony of the holy spirit that the Christian convert is the son of God, a privilege which confers also that of "heir of God, and joint heir with Jesus Christ." The hopes, views, and desires inspired by such a character and situation, raise men to that happy state in which hunger and thirst after righteousness supercede, in a great measure, the denunciations of the law, and in which fear is banished by the confidence of perfect love, and the "full assurance of hope*", which as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, and which entereth into that within the veil, whither the forerunner is for us entered." And every one that hath this hope purifieth

* Heb. vi. 11. x. 19, 20.

himself, even as he is pure, into whose presence and company he desires to come. He is not slothful, but a follower of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. The nature of the Christian's conflict, progress, and views, are thus set forth by the divine energy that breathes in the writings of the great apostle of the Gentiles. "I count all things but loss for the excellency of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having my own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead: not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which

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which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren I count not myself to have apprehended : but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.—For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself *.”

This, my dearly beloved brethren in Jesus Christ, appears to be the train of reasoning indulged by the sacred writers, on all occasions where it is proper and necessary to excite and confirm the Christian faith. Whatever calamities and disappointments attend the pilgrim's progress to the new Jerusalem in this world,

* Philip iii. 20, 21.

there remaineth a rest for the people of God in another : and they know that the Lord Jesus, who by his own power arose from the dead, and has command over all the powers and influences of nature, is able to change this mortal frame into immortality, a state of felicity which, they are assured, is great beyond their utmost power of conception.

This is the motive urged in our text, to comply with the precept of perseverance in the Christian course : " Forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." It is worthy of remark here, that St. Paul does not speak in the future, but in the present time. He does not say, forasmuch as your labour will not, but, forasmuch as your labour is not in vain in the Lord. Although the grand motive to perseverance, the prize for which the Christian contends, the mark towards which he continually presses, be eternal life and glory in a future state, yet neither are other motives wanting
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to urge him forward in his advancement to purity and perfection, besides that great and transcendent reward, nor is that reward itself to be considered merely as future, since hope anticipates, in some degree, the glory and felicity of just men made perfect, and considers the life of God in the soul through faith in Jesus Christ, as the commencement of a new existence; a spiritual being, which shall not be cut off or interrupted by death, but be prolonged into a state of immortality and incorruption. It is not possible to conceive that stronger motives could be urged in favour of a sober, righteous, and godly course of life, than are contained in the Gospel. Our holy religion protects us, if we will but commit ourselves to her protection, from those calamities which irreligious and profligate men bring on themselves by their vices, deprives us of no pleasure, and opens new sources and new powers of enjoyments which never fade, but on the con-

trary, grow and flourish for ever and ever.

The grand springs from which the men of this world eagerly hope for happiness, are sensual pleasure, independence, and more than independence of fortune, and elevation or distinction of rank. These be the gods before which we all of us are naturally too prone to bend the knee: gods which, instead of extricating men from misery, lead them too often into the land of wretchedness and woe, and confine them like prisoners in a gloomy dungeon, in the house of bondage. Miserable comforters, as Job said to his friends, miserable comforters are they all! all that their profusest promises the most faithfully fulfilled can bestow, all their enjoyments, as a great king and the wisest of men by his experience proved, ended in vanity and vexation of spirit. This is not mere rant and declamation; let us view our subject not in general and at a distance, but particularly and

and closely, let us apply to the state and feelings of the votaries of the idols just mentioned, in all the vicissitudes and progress of life, the microscope of attention, and we shall be fully satisfied of the truth, that all the enjoyment which the world holds out to the carnal mind, is both short in its duration, and unsatisfactory in its nature.

With regard to what are called the pleasures of sense, especially those of the grosser kind, they continue but a little while at a time. If we lay aside the preparation and expectation, and strictly compute the actual sensation, we shall be surprised to find how inconsiderable a part of our time they occupy, how few hours in the four and twenty they are able to fill up. They lose their relish by repetition, and when habitual become indifferent. A passion for high and intense pleasure, diminishes, and at last destroys our relish of all other enjoyment, and
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hinders us from providing for, or acquiescing in those common but continuing comforts, those innocent and gently soothing engagements, the due variety and succession of which alone, supply a constant stream of satisfaction.

It is to be observed of those whose main business is the pursuit of pleasure, and who, in this pursuit are neither checked by any restraints of fortune or scruples of conscience, that in the intervals, and these take up by far the greater part of their time, there is a langour, a dejection, and irksomeness about them, painful to themselves, and not very pleasant to those around them. They become by degrees, fastidious in their choice of pleasure, languid in the enjoyment, yet miserable under the want of it. Infatigable indulgence is at last, and often at no late period of life, followed by a total decay of faculties which leaves the voluptuary destitute and desperate, teased by desires that can never be gratified, and torment-
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ed by the remembrance of pleasures that must never return.

As happiness, solid and lasting happiness, is not to be found in the pursuit of pleasure, so neither is it to be found in that ease and affluence, that remission of industry and care, which are the prerogatives of independent fortune. The experience of thousands, the universal and consenting voice of all men who have suddenly left off the habits of business, and retired to some calm and comfortable retreat, proves that there was a greater pleasure in the pursuit of independence, with all the anxiety and suspense that attended it, than in the possession of that independence when obtained. Far be it from me, for it is far from the truth, to affirm or to insinuate any blame of even a sedulous and unremitted pursuit of independent, or, what I think better suits the views and prevailing sentiments of genuine Christianity, competent fortune. Were it necessary, and were it my pre-

sent design, it would be easy to shew how often and how warmly industry in our respective vocations, is recommended and urged in the sacred Scriptures. What I now insist on, is, that the remission of laborious industry alone, where no spiritual enjoyment supplies the vacuity with which that remission is accompanied, is so far from being pleasant, that it is attended with depression of spirits, with imaginary fears, and on the whole is always a disagreeable, and sometimes an intolerable and desperate state. As to the pursuits of fame and ambition, it must be owned that these are of a more exalted nature than those of riches and pleasure, and that success in this is attended with more exquisite delight. But the course of human ambition is arduous, anxious, and uncertain of attaining its end. Success, where greatest, is not long enjoyed, and disappointment leaves the mortified courtier or candidate for honour of every kind, whether civil, literary, or military, a prey to insupportable chagrin.

Now,

Now, although the Christian life is not indeed free from difficulties and pain, yet when it is compared with the different courses pursued by the men of this world, it is a life of pleasantness and peace: and the excess, or surplus, to speak in a plain style, of happiness which results from a sober, righteous, and godly course of life over the amount of all the enjoyments that this world can bestow on the sons of pleasure and pride, may justly be pronounced to be a great reward to virtuous, religious, and good men, even in the present state of their existence; for these have in every situation reason to be chearful and contented. They are not cut off from any safe enjoyment within the reach of bad men. They enjoy the delights of benevolence, charity, and social affection; those of exercising their faculties whether of body or mind, in the pursuit of some engaging and worthy end, which are naturally and for the most part accompanied with good health and spirits; but, if from hereditary or accidental

dental infirmity, they are subjected to bodily distress, the hope of a future state enables them to bear up under it with alacrity. Therefore well may the apostle say, in the words of our text "My beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."

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